

SECOND CORINTHIANS

CHAPTER SEVEN

1 Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

2 Open your hearts to us: we wronged no man, we corrupted no man, we took advantage of no man.

3 I say it not to condemn [you]: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die together and live together.

4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying on your behalf: I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy in all our affliction.

- 1) In his chain of O.T. passages Paul has stressed the privilege of being a dwelling place of God and the benefits of compliance with the divine will. So he continues: "Since we have promises such as these"
  - a) In light of the great promises he has just set forth, Paul reiterates his call for holy living – all Christians are to avoid every source of possible defilement in any aspect of their lives.
  - b) The term "beloved" reveals Paul's affection for the Corinthians.
  - c) "Let us cleanse ourselves" shows how he includes himself with his readers as those who must fulfill the exhortation.
  - d) The term "defilement" is found only here in the New Testament and only three times in the LXX. In all cases it denotes religious defilement.
  - e) "Body and spirit" represents the Christian in his total personality, outwardly and inwardly, physically and spiritually, in his relationships with other people and with God.
  - f) Paul may be implying that the Corinthians had become defiled, perhaps by occasional attendance at idol-shrines or by continuing to attend festivals or ceremonies in pagan temples (1 Cor. 8:10; 10:14-22), or even by maintaining their membership in some local pagan cult.
  - g) If they make a clean break with pagan life in every form, they would be bringing their holiness nearer completion by this proof of their reverence for God.
  - h) Paul's call for holy living ends on a high note – *and make holiness perfect in the fear of God.*
    - i) Making their holiness perfect would involve abandoning all compromise with idolatry.
    - ii) This break is one that they would have to make themselves, but in this, as in all growth in holiness, they could depend upon God's grace mediated through the Spirit of holiness.
    - iii) *The fear of God* is to be understood not as terror but as "reverential awe."
- 2) Paul renews his appeal for the Corinthians full affection. V. 2.
  - a) He knew of nothing in his past conduct or instruction that could cause them to doubt his sincerity or lose confidence in him.

- b) Paul had apparently been accused of bringing about the moral and/or financial ruin of some by exploiting them (v. 2) and apparently some at Corinth were inclined, at least in part, to believe the charges. As before (cf. 1 Cor 4:4; 2 Cor. 4:2; 5:11; 6:3), Paul appeals to his clear conscience and the Corinthian's knowledge of his conduct and insists that the charges are groundless.
- c) "Open your hearts" is aorist imperative, indicating that Paul was looking for some specific action, rather than simply making a general exhortation, which in turn suggests that Paul believed that there was still some reticence on the part of the Corinthians to make room in their hearts for him.
- d) To support this renewed appeal, Paul asserts his integrity on three levels, in each case using the aorist tense indicating that he has in mind the particular occasions of his past visits to Corinth and the manner in which he conducted himself while there.
  - i) He had wronged no man, in fact he had been wronged. (See v. 12 which may apply to Paul.)
  - ii) He had corrupted no man. The verb *to corrupt* (*phtheiro*) is used three times in the Corinthian letters.
    - 1) 1 Cor. 3:17 – any one who "destroys" (*phtheirei*) God's temple, God will "destroy" (*phtheirei*).
    - 2) 1 Cor. 15:33 – evil companions "corrupt" (*phtheirousin*) good morals. (A parallel use is found in Eph. 4:22 where the "old nature" is said to be "corrupt" (*phtheiromenon*) through deceitful lusts.)
    - 3) His most likely meaning is that in his teaching and conduct he has done the church no harm; he has not corrupted it or encouraged immoral conduct.
  - iii) He had taken advantage (*pleonekteo*) of no one. This is one of four times Paul uses this verb in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians.
    - 1) 2:11 – the church will be taken advantage of by Satan if he is allowed to rob it of one of its members.
    - 2) 12:17, 18 – used of taking advantage of people for financial gain. It is likely this meaning that attaches here. Paul claims integrity in financial matters. He has not used his position for financial gain.
- 3) Paul does not mention the charges to condemn them, nor did he intend to condemn them by clearing himself. He reminds them that they occupy a permanent and secure place in his love and concern. He has confidence in them; he takes pride in them, he would live or die with them. Neither the arrival of death nor the trials of life could divorce them from his affection.
  - a) In the papyri the expression "to live together and to die together" is found where mutual friendship and loyalty are extolled.
  - b) The idea is that those involved have a loyalty and friendship that will be sustained throughout life and will keep them together even if death is involved (cf. Mark 14:31).

- c) In his affirmation of friendship Paul reverses the order, *i.e.* not to live and die, but to die and live together, and this reflects a fundamental Christian outlook.
  - d) It is by dying that we live; it is by suffering that we are prepared for glory.
  - e) The idea originated with Jesus himself (*cf.* Mark 8:34-36; John 12:24-26) and is found frequently in the writings of Paul (*cf.* Rom. 6:8; 8:17, 36-39; 2 Cor. 4:8-12, 16-18; 2 Tim. 2:11).
- 4) The situation at Corinth was not perfect and probably never would be, but Paul had grounds for great confidence and pride in his converts. In spite of all his frustrations and in the midst of all his affliction he was filled with comfort and overflowing with joy (v.4; cf. 6:10).
- a) This expression of confidence and pride, repeated in vv. 14, 16, indicates that despite the attacks on his integrity, at this point Paul still believed strongly in the basic loyalty of the Corinthians towards him.
  - b) It only needed to be released from the restrictions brought about by painful past events and the criticisms they had entertained concerning his integrity.
  - c) When Paul says that he is filled with comfort and joyful in affliction, it is almost certainly a reflection of the great relief and joy he experienced when he heard of the steps taken by the Corinthians in obedience to the demands he made in the “severe” letter. By so doing they had demonstrated their loyalty to him.
- 5) The reason: the safe arrival of Titus in Macedonia with encouraging news about Corinth (vv. 5-7). Quite naturally, Paul has returned to his travel narrative that was suspended in 2:13.

5 For even when we were come into Macedonia our flesh had no relief, but [we were] afflicted on every side; without [were] fightings, within [were] fears.

6 Nevertheless he that comforteth the lowly, [even] God, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

7 and not by his coming only, but also by the comfort wherewith he was comforted in you, while he told us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced yet more.

- 1) Paul resumes the account of his movements broken off at 2:13. Although he expected to meet Titus when he (Paul) arrived in Macedonia, his hopes were frustrated just as they had been at Troas (2:12,13). His body (flesh) had no rest.
- a) In 2:13 he had said that his spirit had experienced no rest at Troas.
  - b) If a distinction is to be drawn between the spirit of 2:13 and the flesh of 7:5, terms often contrasted in Paul’s writing (*e.g.*, Gal. 5:16-24), the former denotes Paul in his spiritual sensitivity; the latter, Paul in his physical suffering.
  - c) It is possible that the terms here are virtually synonymous, being used

loosely of the whole person in a non-technical manner.

- 2) “Fears within” alludes to Paul’s persistent apprehension about Titus’s reception at Corinth, his safety in travel, and the Corinthian response to the “severe letter.”
- 3) “Conflicts on the outside” may point to violent quarreling that focused on Paul (the term translated “conflicts” or “fightings” is applied to quarrellings and disputes, 2 Tim. 2:23; Tit. 3:9; Jas. 4:1), particularly heated disputations either with unbelievers (Acts 17:5-14) or Christian opponents in Macedonia (*cf.* Phil 3:2). It could also refer to persistent opposition or persecution that beset him after his arrival in Macedonia (*cf.* 8:1-2).
- 4) Whatever the nature of the fightings and fears, it is clear that Paul was in a state of some distress as he awaited Titus’ arrival in Macedonia.

#### **Vv. 6-7.**

- 5) Paul knew this comfort not only in the sense of verbal encouragement, but also in God intervened to alleviate his situation (1:3-11; *cf.* Isa. 49:13), assured him of his protection (*cf.* Acts 18:9-10), and when necessary provided the grace to endure (*cf.* 12:7-10).
- 6) It probably seemed to Paul that from the human point of view his whole future as apostle to the Gentiles was related to the Corinthians reaction to his assertion of authority in the letter delivered by Titus. And now Titus’ failure to arrive tended to confirm his worst fears.
  - a) God used three means to dispense comfort to the depressed or downhearted apostle;
    - i) The actual arrival of Titus that, though long delayed but finally achieved, brought great relief to Paul.
    - ii) Titus’s positive experience at Corinth.
      - 1) When Titus set out for Corinth as Paul’s envoy after Paul’s “painful” visit, he would have done so with a good deal of apprehension, despite Paul’s confidence in his converts.
      - 2) The reassuring news he brought concerning the Corinthians’ attitude toward Paul -- their affection for him or longing to see him and be reconciled to him, their deep sorrow over their disloyal behavior, and their ardent concern to defend Paul’s cause and to follow his directions in disciplining the guilty party.
    - iii) Titus’ safe arrival from Corinth and the encouragement he had received there had brought Paul a joy that was increased by the favorable news that Titus brought.

#### **The severe letter and its effect. 7:8-13a.**

8 For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it: though I did regret [it] (for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though but for a season),

9 I now rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye were made sorry unto repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly sort, that ye might suffer loss by us in nothing.

10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, [a repentance] which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

11 For behold, this selfsame thing, that ye were made sorry after a godly sort, what earnest care it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what longing, yea what zeal, yea what avenging! In everything ye approved yourselves to be pure in the matter.

12 So although I wrote unto you, I [wrote] not for his cause that did the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered the wrong, but that your earnest care for us might be made manifest unto you in the sight of God.

13a Therefore we have been comforted:

## VV. 8-10.

- 1) “My letter” is most likely an unpreserved letter that was written after Paul’s “sorrowful visit” and was delivered by Titus. From the report of Titus Paul had learned for the first time that his letter had caused the Corinthians considerable distress, at least for a period (v. 8).
  - a) As a spiritual father who disliked causing pain for whatever reason, his first reaction was to regret that he had written so stern a letter that the recipients were pained by it (8b) (the “it hurts me more than it hurts you” syndrome).
  - b) But at some time later, possibly after Titus had completed his report or after Paul had had time to reflect on the whole episode, his initial regret caused by a natural spontaneous reaction had altogether disappeared before the joyful realization that out of the temporary pain suffered by the Corinthians had come sincere repentance.
  - c) Thus, at the time of writing, Paul could say he did not now regret it, but was happy because their sorrow led to repentance (vv. 8, 9).
- 2) Of what had the Corinthians repented?
  - a) Probably their failure to defend Paul before his detractor (“the one who did the wrong,” v. 12).
  - b) Because their sorrow was “as God intended” (it produced repentance, v. 10a), Paul’s letter that had caused temporary pain caused no permanent harm (v. 9b).

## V. 10.

- c) V. 10 describes two ways of reacting to pain or sorrow.
  - i) God’s way (“godly sorrow”) or sorrow as God intended, invariably produces a change of heart and this repentance “leads to salvation”

and therefore gives no cause for regret.

- ii) Sorrow borne in a worldly way, on the other hand, does not lead to repentance but has the deadly effect of producing resentment or bitterness.
- iii) What makes suffering remedial is not the actual experience of it but the reaction to it; a “godly” or positive reaction brings blessing; a “worldly” or negative reaction causes harm.

**v. 11.**

- d) An example of the beneficial outcome of “godly sorrow” was the positive response of the Corinthians to Paul’s letter that had for a time pained them.
  - i) It might have compounded trouble at Corinth and caused widespread resentment against Paul had it not been received in a spirit of humility and with a willingness to follow God’s will.
  - ii) As it was, it produced in them:
    - (1) Earnestness -- seriousness of purpose.
    - (2) Eagerness -- to clear themselves from blame.
    - (3) Indignation -- at the scandalous action of the person who denigrated Paul.
    - (4) Alarm -- over their behavior and its effects.
    - (5) Affection -- for Paul or longing to see him in person.
    - (6) Concern -- lest he should visit them “rod in hand” (1 Cor. 4:21; cf. 2 Cor. 7:15; 13:2).
    - (7) Readiness to see justice done -- by the punishment of the offender (cf. 2:6).
  - iii) The Corinthians had put themselves in the right.

**vv. 12-13a.**

- e) Paul’s principal aim in writing the “severe letter” was that the Corinthians should come to recognize “before God” how devoted to their spiritual father they really were (cf. 2:9). Such recognition “before God” or “in the sight of God” would ensure future loyalty to Paul. Since this aim was achieved and God prevented the letter from making the Corinthians resentful, Paul was encouraged.
- f) As it is stated, this Corinthian recognition was the sole purpose of the letter. However, what is expressed as a stark contrast (“not this, nor this, but that”) is actually simply a comparison (“not so much this or this as that”).
- g) Subsidiary objectives for the letter, then, were twofold:
  - i) The punishment of the guilty party (the one who did the wrong);
    - (1) Not certain who he was, assuming he was not the man

- guilty of incest. 1 Cor. 5:1ff.
- ii) The vindication of the injured party.
    - (1) If 1 Cor. 5 and 2 Cor. 2 are related, the father of the guilty party would be the injured party.
    - (2) Most likely it was Paul himself.

**The relief of Titus. 7:13b-16.**

13b And in our comfort we joyed the more exceedingly for the joy of Titus, because his spirit hath been refreshed by you all.

14 For if in anything I have gloried to him on your behalf, I was not put to shame; but as we spake all things to you in truth, so our glorying also which I made before Titus was found to be truth.

15 And his affection is more abundantly toward you, while he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him.

16 I rejoice that in everything I am of good courage concerning you.

**Vv. 13b-14.**

- 1) Through the "godly sorrow" of the Corinthians, Titus was as relieved and encouraged as Paul (v.13a).
  - a) Apparently Titus had had little or no occasion before his visit to Corinth as bearer of the "severe letter" to form an independent judgment about the Corinthians; so he was dependent on Paul's glowing recommendation.
  - b) This would suggest that this visit, on which he also began to organize the collection (8:6a), was his first.
    - i) But it is not impossible that he had already paid a very brief visit shortly after 1 Corinthians was received at Corinth to initiate the collection by carrying out the directions of 1 Corinthians 16:2.
- 2) Whether it was his first or second visit, he seems to have ventured on it with some trepidation that was possibly based on a previous encounter with the Corinthians.
  - a) But all the believers had "helped put his mind at ease" (v.13b).
    - i) However, the phrase (*anapepautai to pneuma autou*) may also mean "his spirit has been refreshed."
    - ii) Perhaps both refreshment and relief had come to Titus.
- 3) Paul's relief stemmed from the fact that his generous assurances to Titus about the Corinthians had not proved unfounded and therefore embarrassing (v.14).
- 4) On the contrary (*alla*), just as his own truthfulness had been vindicated at Corinth (cf. 1:18-20), so also his boasting about them had now proved fully justified.

**Vv. 15-16.**

- 1) The reception of Titus at Corinth had been given "with fear and trembling"; i.e., the Corinthian Christians were anxious to the point of nervousness, fearing (cf. v. 11) that corporately they would fail to meet all their obligations toward an envoy from Paul (cf. the same phrase *meta phobou kai tromou* in Eph 6:5; Phil 2:12; see also 1 Cor 2:3).
- 2) Moreover, they had all readily complied with some demand Titus had made of them.
  - a) Whenever he recalled their obedience and respectful deference to him, his affection grew all the warmer (v.15).
  - b) This gave Paul good reason for complete confidence in the Corinthians (v.16) and a secure base from which to propose the completion of the collection (chs. 8, 9).