

2nd Corinthians Chapters 7-8

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Introduction:

Paul alternates between warnings about mixing with idols and the defilement this brings and getting things done for the glory of God.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE CHANGES

(1) Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God.

- The **promises** are from the previous chapter: **"I will be your Father and you will My sons and daughters."**
- With some, there is an expectation that **God** will revamp our character and correct any flaws. No, He is developing us for heaven by giving us the opportunity to change while we walk this vale of tears. *The changes are up to us.*
- Defiling **body** or **spirit** could be understood as what we do and what we think about. **David Guzik** observes that those stained in **body** such as harlots and tax collectors found it easier to come to Jesus than those stained in the **spirit** such as the scribes and the Pharisees.
- Paul included himself in the instruction by using **ourselves**. He didn't picture himself as having arrived at some growth goal. If he hadn't arrived, that guarantees that we have a trip to make, too.
- Missing from this inspired first sentence is: "Cleanse others from everything that can defile." Our task is to **cleanse ourselves because we fear God.**

1. How does a true "fear of God" help us "...work toward complete holiness"?

PLEASE BE OPEN

(2) Please open your hearts to us. We have not done wrong to anyone, nor led anyone astray, nor taken advantage of anyone. (3) I'm not saying this to condemn you. I said before that you are in our hearts, and we live or die together with you.

- Paul is confronting the Corinthians, but not **condemning** them. While there is a difference, those being confronted may have trouble distinguishing between the two!

One change is for the Corinthians to become more open to Paul as he has asked previously. The Father and the Son set the example for transparency.

The Father and I are one. John 10:30:

- The Corinthians must have believed bad things about Paul because he asserts that he hasn't **wronged** any of them or **led anyone astray** or **taken advantage of anyone**.

(4) I have the highest confidence in you, and I take great pride in you. You have greatly encouraged me and made me happy despite all our troubles.

- Paul did not put down his readers because some of them were putting him down. Instead, he had the highest **confidence** in them. Some of them had **encouraged** him and brought **happiness** to his days in spite of the **troubles** he was experiencing from local critics. He will elaborate on this in verse 6.

(5) When we arrived in Macedonia, there was no rest for us. We faced conflict from every direction, with battles on the outside and fear on the inside.

- When Paul **arrived in Macedonia**, he found **no rest**. He battled with extreme critics on one hand as well as having

fears within for the church at Corinth. But we serve a God who will help His servants with **unrest**.

THE JOY OF PAUL

(6) But God, who encourages those who are discouraged, encouraged us by the arrival of Titus. (7) His presence was a joy, but so was the news he brought of the encouragement he received from you. When he told us how much you long to see me, and how sorry you are for what happened, and how loyal you are to me, I was filled with joy!

- God's **encouragement** came in the person of **Titus**. **Titus** exuded **joy** and good **news**. **He** reported that the church wanted to **see** Paul and they were **sorry** for something that had happened and were **loyal** to Paul. Such a relief!

THE LETTER THAT WORKED

(8) I am not sorry that I sent that severe letter to you, though I was sorry at first, for I know it was painful to you for a little while. (9) Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to repent and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants His people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way.

- Now Paul could see that his earlier strategy had worked. His **severe** letter had caused **pain** for a while, but he did not have to show a heavy hand in person to get the local problem or problems fixed. Their **kind of sorrow** is exactly what **God wanted**.

(10) For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.

2. What kind of sorrows might we have today that are "Godly" and what kind of sorrows might be "worldly" in our lives today?

3. What is the key ingredient of good "Godly" sorrow?

4

- The direction of the **sorrow** led them **away from sin**. Another kind of **sorrow** leads to **spiritual death** because it lacks the **repentance** component. **William Barclay** observes that "trouble is like disease. If it is dealt with at the right time, it can often easily be eradicated; if not, it can become an incurable growth."

(11) Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish wrong. You showed that you have done everything necessary to make things right.

- The beautiful response at Corinth was **godly sorrow** and an effort to clear up the **wrong**. Further it issued in a desire for the leaders to see Paul and **punish** the sin at hand.

(12) My purpose, then, was not to write about who did the wrong or who was wronged. I wrote to you so that in the sight of God you could see for yourselves how loyal you are to us.

- Paul was not on a path to placing blame. Frequently in modern church life the analyzers work at placing blame, which always means going into the past and almost never brings a solution, but more quibbling and anger. Jesus did not come ^{to} pass judgment on our past:

God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him.

(John 3:17 NLT)

We are sinners and need salvation. The precise details of our sins are not important.

PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT

(13) We have been greatly encouraged by this. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was about the way all of you welcomed Him and set his mind at ease.

- Two events **encouraged** the rugged apostle:
 - The Corinthians had repented of the evil allowed in the church and taken sides with him and punished the evil doer with a view to changing him.
 - The **happiness** of Titus in the **way** he was received by the Corinthian church.

(14) I had told him how proud I was of you -- and you didn't disappoint me. I have always told you the truth, and now my boasting to Titus has also proved true!

- Paul had **boasted** to Titus about the Corinthians before the full story had played out. Now his **boasting** had proven to be **true**.

(15) Now he cares for you more than ever when he remembers the way all of you obeyed him and welcomed him with such fear and deep respect. (16) I am very happy now because I have complete confidence in you.

- The outcome for Titus that he had an even higher regard for the Corinthian brethren and Paul had **complete confidence** in them, also. Paul did not put the church on probation for two or three years with a warning. He expected the best from them and they performed.

THE GENEROSITY OF OTHER CONGREGATIONS

(8:1) Now I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, what God in His kindness has done through the churches in Macedonia.

- Corinth was not the only **church** in Greece.
 - One had been established at *Thessalonica* (Acts 17:1 and following)
 - plus one at *Berea* (Acts 17:10 and following).
 - Perhaps there was one at Athens (Acts 17:34).
 - Some commentaries even include the church at Philippi.
- One demonstration of God's working among these **Macedonian churches** is seen in their generosity.



(2) They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity. (3) For I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will.

- They had little wealth and **many troubles**, but they also were **filled with joy** and that expressed itself in **abundant generosity**. They **gave** beyond what they could afford and they did it on their own. No fundraising dinners, no begging mail. It was entirely **of their own free will**.
- Many years ago this writer served as Forwarding Agent for a missionary family in Africa. All of the gifts for the mission came through my hands and I deposited the money in the bank and then the missionaries could access the account from Africa. One check was a third party check. The donor

had just endorsed it to the mission. The check was for giving blood. That was a touching gift.

(4) They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. (5) They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.

- Imagine churches **begging** for the **privilege** of **giving**! And financially poor churches at that. And further, these were Gentiles begging to give to Jews. The magic of being one in Christ was bearing fruit in the form of cash. The key was they had **given themselves** to the **Lord** first. This is a further commentary on the story from Jesus:

While Jesus was in the Temple, He watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box. Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins. "I tell you the truth," Jesus said, "this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has."

Luke 21:1-4

4. In what ways does "giving of ourselves first to the LORD" look like today?

(6) So we have urged Titus, who encouraged your giving in the first place, to return to you and encourage you to finish this ministry of giving. (7) Since you excel in so many ways -- in your faith, your gifted speakers, your knowledge, your enthusiasm, and your love from us -- I want you to excel also in this gracious act of giving.

- **Titus** had **encouraged** Corinth to **give** and now Paul was urging **Titus** to return to the church and conclude the offering amounts.

- Paul commended their **faith** and also commended their **gifted speakers**, their **knowledge**, their **enthusiasm** and their **love**.

(8) I am not commanding you to do this. But I am testing how genuine your love is by comparing it with the eagerness of the other churches.

- Paul was not ordering them to give, but he was **testing** their **love** by **comparing** it with **other churches**.

(9) You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that by His poverty He could make you rich.

- The ultimate example of **generous** giving is **our Lord Jesus Christ**. Consider His previous wealth:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through Him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see -- such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through Him and for Him. He existed before anything else, and He holds all creation together.

Colossians 1:15-17

The **wealth** of **Jesus** is beyond human comprehension. All of the banks and investment funds in the world are worthless chicken feed compared to the Creator of the universe. Yet because of His love for mankind He became **poor** and was born into humanity. Poverty feels worse to those who have been rich. During His ministry there was no place He could call home. His ministry was financed by some ladies whom He had helped.

By His **poverty** His followers could be guaranteed the **riches** of heaven for all of eternity.

All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be My children.

Revelation 21:7

(10) Here is my advice: It would be good for you to finish what you started a year ago. Last year you were the first who wanted to give, and you were the first to begin doing it. (11) Now you should finish what you started. Let the eagerness you showed in the beginning be matched now by your giving. Give in proportion to what you have.

- Paul now urges the church at Corinth to complete the offering they had started **a year ago**. Don't wait longer for crops to be sold in the market place or animals to mature so they can be sold to traders. Give based on what you have now. You were **eager** to launch the offering project, now wrap it up.

(12) Whatever you give is acceptable if you give it eagerly. And give according to what you have, not what you don't have. (13) Of course, I don't mean your giving should make life easy for others and hard for yourselves. I only mean that there should be some equality.

- God wants your **giving** to be done **eagerly**, not grudgingly or painfully. It's clear that this giving should not be viewed as an assessment.

(14) Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal. (15) As the Scriptures say, "Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough."

- The quotation is from Exodus 16 and is discussing picking up manna each morning:

So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little. But when they measured it out, everyone had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had just what it needed. Exodus 16:17-18

God intervened to equalize the manna supply for everyone and He will meet the needs of the Corinthians if the financial scene is reversed some time in the future.

THESE MEN WILL HELP ME

(16) But thank God! He has given Titus the same enthusiasm for you that I have. (17) Titus welcomed our request that he visit you again. In fact, he himself was very eager to go and see you.

- **Enthusiasm** plays a part in the Lord's work. Godliness is not being detached and remote from others. Some think that being indecisive is a virtue, but look at the roadkill on the highways.
- **Titus welcomed** Paul's request for him to return to Corinth.

(18) We are also sending another brother with Titus. All the churches praise him as a preacher of the Good News. (19) He was appointed by the churches to accompany us as we take the offering to Jerusalem -- a service that glorifies the Lord and shows our eagerness to help.

- While we cannot be sure who this other **brother** was, Luke does fit the description. He would have written a

masterful story of the life of Christ and would be able to present it in a compelling way.

(20) We are traveling together to guard against any criticism for the way we are handling this generous gift.

- This offering was gathered in a world without electronic banking, so it was cash. Paul wanted to guard against any **criticism** from others, so he insisted on a group **traveling together**.
- Without suggesting trouble, he may have wanted a group of men to move the money to Jerusalem so they would be less likely to be waylaid by bandits.



(21) We are careful to be honorable before the Lord, but we also want everyone else to see that we are honorable.

- While a person in the spotlight may use great care to be **honorable** before the **Lord**, Christians need to be careful how their actions look to others. While this discussion is about the stewardship of money, it certainly applies to matters like the interaction we have with those of the opposite sex. When this widowed writer has ladies into his home for classes, the lights are always on and the curtains are always open. No exceptions.

(22) We are also sending with them another of our brothers who has proven himself many times and has shown on many occasions how eager he is. He is now even more enthusiastic because of his great confidence in you.

- There is no way to establish the identity of this man, either. But it is clear that Paul wants men on the trip who are qualified. **William Barclay** makes an insightful comment:

It is most interesting to note that this same Paul, who could write like a lyric poet and think like a theologian

could, when it was necessary, act with the meticulous accuracy of a chartered accountant. He was a big enough man to do the little things and the practical things supremely well.

(23) If anyone asks about Titus, say that he is my partner who works with me to help you. And the brothers with him have been sent by the churches, and they bring honor to Christ.

- Paul adds his endorsement of those who will make the trip from Corinth to Jerusalem. **Titus** is his working **partner** and the others have been **sent** by other congregations **and they bring honor to Christ**.

(24) So show them your love, and prove to all the churches that our boasting about you is justified.

- **Show them your love** and not your suspicions. We have **boasted** about the Corinthian church to other congregations, so **justify** my **boasting**.