

2 CORINTHIANS 7-9 GODLY REPENTANCE; GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER



As we begin 2 Cor. 7, Paul, in the previous chapter, told them not to be "yoked" with pagans and their sinful practices. He writes, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, *let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*" (2 Cor. 7:1).

Inner and outer spiritual cleansing

As *The Life Application Bible* notes, "Purifying ourselves is a twofold action: turning away from sin, and turning toward God. 'Perfecting [Gk. spiritually developing] holiness' meant *having nothing to do with paganism*. They were to make a clean break with their past and give themselves to God alone."

Wiersbe's Commentary adds, "Because of God's gracious promises, *we have some spiritual responsibilities to carry out*. We must cleanse ourselves once and for all of anything that defiles us. It is not enough to ask God to cleanse us; we must clean up our own lives and *get rid of those things that make it easy for us to sin*."

"Too often Christians deal with *symptoms* and not *causes*. We keep confessing the same sins because *we have not gotten to the root of the trouble* and truly 'cleansed ourselves.' Perhaps there is 'filthiness of the flesh,' some pet sin that 'feeds the appetites' of the old nature (Rom. 13:14). Or it may be 'filthiness of the spirit' -- *attitudes* that are sinful."

"But cleansing ourselves is only *half of the responsibility*; we must also be '*perfecting holiness in the fear of God*.' This is a *constant process* as we *grow in grace and knowledge* (2 Pet. 3:18). *It is vital to be balanced and apply both*. The Pharisees were keen on *putting away sin*, but they *neglected perfecting inward holiness*. But it is foolish to try perfecting holiness if there is known sin in our lives."

"So, he exhorted them to *separate from the world* and to *appreciate him*. He was attempting to *regain the love and devotion* of the believers in Corinth."

Worldly versus genuine repentance

Thus, Paul returns to the problem of the slanderous accusations against him from the false intruders. He pleads, "Open your hearts to us. We have *wronged no one*, we have *corrupted no one*, we have *cheated no one*. I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together" (2 Cor. 7:2-3).

As *Wiersbe's Commentary* notes, "The Church had received Titus and now they should receive

Paul. He asked them to trust him, for he had never done anything to wrong them. This is certainly a reference to the false teachers who had accused Paul, especially the use of the term 'cheated,' accusing Paul of taking up this missionary offering so he could use the money himself!"

"Why is it so difficult to assure people of our love? What more could Paul do to convince them? He was willing to die for them if necessary, for they were in his heart. He was boasting of them to others ('glorying of you'), but they were criticizing him."

He then explains his reason for the corrective letter sent to them, saying: "Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation. For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of *your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more*" (2 Cor. 7:4-7).

So, Titus had informed him that the corrective letter, most likely, First Corinthians, had achieved the desired results: the brethren had suspended the sexually immoral man from coming to Church and they had regretted their moral negligence about it.

Paul says to them, "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that *your sorrow led to repentance*. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For *godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation*, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

Here we see that there is a type of repentance that is not spiritually profitable: worldly repentance. It occurs when a person regrets the negative consequences of the sin but doesn't actually change his lifestyle. It's like a captured thief before a judge who is apologetic about facing the punishment but doesn't repent of being a thief.

Similarly, it would have been pointless for the Corinthians to merely feel sorrowful about Paul's rebuke and not take action. Yet, they didn't just lament the correction; they did change their ways and took the right course of action—temporarily removing the sexually immoral man from the Church until he repented. True repentance means not only feeling bad about what is done but also undergoing a change in behavior and deeds. It involves more than just acknowledging a specific sin; it requires changing our attitudes and results.

Note he doesn't praise the Corinthians for their sorrow but for their actions. He says: "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you. Therefore, we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Therefore, I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything" (2 Cor. 7:11-16).

The collection taken to Judea

Now Paul deals with the substantial offering he was in charge of collecting from his mostly Gentile churches to help the brethren in Judea, who were suffering from a terrible drought and famine, predicted by the prophet Agabus (Acts 11:28-30).

He exhorts them, "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in *the riches of their liberality*. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive *the gift* [funds] and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (2 Cor. 8:1-4).

The Macedonian churches in Philippi and Thessalonica are repeatedly praised by Paul for their generosity (Phil. 2:25; 4:15; 1 Thes. 4:9-10).

The problem was that the Corinthians were not following the example of the Macedonians—even though they enjoyed greater material abundance—because they had become complacent in this regard. Paul seeks to spur them on using the example of the Macedonians and that of Jesus Christ, urging them to fulfill what they had resolved to carry out of that collection to the saints in Judea.

He says to them: "But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have" (2 Cor. 8:7-11).

The Corinthians were committed in helping with that offering and had asked Paul for instructions. In his first letter, he explains, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, you should follow the directions I gave to the churches in Galatia. After the Sabbath ends, each of you should set aside and save something from your surplus in proportion to what you have, so that no collections will have to be made when I arrive. When I arrive, I will send letters along with the men you approve to take your gift to Jerusalem" (1 Cor. 16:1-2, ISV).

Paul learned the brethren were not setting aside those funds as they had promised. Now, almost a year later, he urges them in this second epistle not to embarrass him. He says, "For if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we—not to mention you—would be ashamed of having been so confident [of carrying it out]" (2 Cor. 9:3-4).

Remember that the offering here was entirely voluntary, a point Paul constantly emphasizes. It is not like the tithe or an offering on a holy day, which are commanded by God. They may choose whether

or not to participate, but once they have committed, they should keep their word.

Paul has to defend himself about this collection, as false teachers were accusing him of wanting to pocket the funds. So, Paul explains how carefully he had conducted everything openly and honestly. He says, "But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord. And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us—providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you. If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you. Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore, show to them, and before the churches *the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf*" (2 Cor. 8:17-24).

God loves a cheerful giver

In Chapter 9, Paul gives the principle of God loving *a cheerful giver*. He says, "Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation. But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; *for God loves a cheerful giver*. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work" (2 Cor. 9:5-8).

This principle of freely giving is found throughout the Bible but now made very explicit here. God commands us to be generous just as Christ and Him are, and They have shown us this

through Their ultimate example: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins...We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:10, 19).

As Dt. 15:7-10 says, "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren...you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs...You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand."

God says: "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself" (Prov. 11:25). Jesus adds: "It is more blessed *to give* than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Paul goes on to explain this principle of giving—how one will be blessed far more in return, saying: "Now may He [God] who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:9-15).

It is not easy to part with material possessions. God knows this, yet we must trust and obey, for He does not want a group of stingy people leading God's kingdom under Christ. David, for instance, was a great example of being a cheerful giver when he presented a huge offering to God for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. He also mentioned a profound truth about giving and demonstrating an attitude we all ought to possess as aptly described in 1 Chron. 29:1-22 (NLT).

So, no matter what the need of Church may be, God's people through time have always been known for having a very generous and a cheerfully giving heart. May it continue always to be that way!