

A Study of Second Corinthians

Week Five

2 Corinthians 6:11-7:16

Day One

11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. 13 As a fair exchange — I speak as to my children — open wide your hearts also. 14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

v. 11 – Paul spoke freely and honestly to the saints in Corinth. How I wish the saints today would speak freely to one another, but do it in a spirit of kindness. I often go to a church where there is a problem with staff, volunteers or the pastor. When I ask those who are telling me the problem, “Have you told that person?” Often the answer is, “No. It would hurt their feelings” or “Their parents are in the church and good members.” **Why can’t we speak freely to one another? When someone does speak freely to you, do your feelings get hurt?**

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, *speaking the truth in love*, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4:14-16).

v. 12 – Whatever Paul did, he was doing it out of love. Paul never seemed to spend any time questioning his own motives:

I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me (1 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Do you beat yourself up, so to speak, when something doesn’t go right or someone doesn’t respond properly to you? If so, why not make a decision to stop doing that?

v. 13 – Paul appealed for them to meet him in the same manner and spirit with which he met them—with open hearts and affection. I don’t think we can receive from any leader or, if you are a leader, people can receive from you, if hearts are not open. Revelation and teaching isn’t a “mind thing” but a “spirit thing.” If spirits are blocked, then we cannot receive from God’s leaders. **Is your heart blocked in any way, blocking what you could receive from those appointed to teach? I think this principle can also apply in school or at work. So perhaps you need to search your heart and work to remove whatever blockages there may be to you receiving what God has for you through others, especially leaders.**

v. 14 – This is such an important principle! We must be careful not to be “unequally yoked.” When two oxen were together in one yoke, it was important that they pulled

together, or else their work would be ineffective. It would also be painful for both of them as the yoke would chafe rather than work for and with them. **Are you unequally yoked in any situation? Is there a chafing, a pain, that needs to be addressed? What are you prepared to do about it?**

Day Two

15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

v. 15 – Paul offered the options in the starkest terms. You will either serve Christ or Satan. There can be no common ground between the Spirit of light and the spirit of darkness. I have always told my children that you can't expect Christian behavior from non-Christians! They can't produce the fruit of the Spirit when they don't have the Spirit! Don't even look for common ground with those who don't know Jesus. You won't find it. This doesn't mean that you break relationship with every non-believer with whom you have a relationship. But it does mean that you should be careful, and that you must manage your expectations accordingly.

v. 16 – Notice that Paul didn't write that you as an individual are a temple. He wrote that *we* are a temple of the Spirit. Paul did not promote individualism; he was busy building Christ's body, of which we all are a part. Paul quoted a principle here that was oft presented in the Old Testament (see Leviticus 26:12). God's desire was and is to dwell among His people; not among a group of individuals, but among His people corporately. **What are you doing to promote the presence of God among the people to whom He has joined you? Is there unity? Fellowship? Love? A sharing of spiritual gifts? Honor? If not, why not?**

v. 17 – Biblical holiness involves the concept that we are set apart for Him. It doesn't necessarily pertain to right living or behavior. That is more in line with the term righteousness. For instance, if you have good china that is only used for special occasions, that china would be considered holy—set apart for special use. It has nothing to do with the character or quality of the china necessarily. It has everything to do with the intent of the owner and not the quality of the vessel at hand.

With that in mind, we are set apart for God's special use and purpose. We are not to dilute or diminish that purpose by giving the best of who we are and what God has given us to those who don't serve Him. You must recognize that you are not your own. That covers your career, free time, hobbies, where you live and what you do. You are set apart for God's use, not just while you are in church but all the time.

v. 18 – It is interesting that some of the best “New Testament” Christians in the Bible only had the Old Testament to work with. David, for example, was a great worshiper, and he didn’t even have the Old Testament! He wrote parts of the Old Testament by what he endured as he followed God. Jesus worked and ministered effectively while only drawing on Old Testament verses and principles. Paul too was brilliant at writing what we know to be the New Testament using Old Testament verses. How much more should we be “New Testament” Christians since we have both the Old and the New Testaments! **Are you living in the fullness of your Scriptural inheritance? How familiar are you with the Old Testament? Are you living in the fullness of your blessing available from both Testaments?**

Day Three

7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. 4 I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.

v. 1 – Paul was referring to the promises that he had just quoted from the Old Testament. **Do you possess these promises? Can you handle the Old Testament properly, not reverting to the Law, but sorting out those things that are relevant for your life today?**

What is the result of possessing these Old Testament promises? It should be holiness, a separation for the purposes of God. It means avoiding anything and everything that can contaminate body and spirit. That could mean, but doesn’t necessarily mean, such things as movies and certain kinds of music.

Yet you must keep in mind that it says you must separate yourself; you mustn’t work to make sure others separate themselves. When that happens, you will become legalistic. Many fellowships over the years developed rules concerning dancing, jewelry, makeup, dress and television and imposed those rules on everyone who came along. **Is this what the apostle intended to happen? Is someone necessarily holy because they don’t watch certain movies or listen to certain kinds of music?**

v. 2 – Paul exhorted them to make room for him and his team in their hearts. Paul could confidently say that he had wronged, corrupted or exploited anyone.

Lord, that is my goal, too. I don’t want to exploit anyone. I don’t want to manipulate people into giving me anything that isn’t in their heart to give. I want to serve them as I serve You, keeping my expectations in You for my return. Keep me, Lord, from false doctrines and unimportant emphases as I teach and write. Help me to lift people up, not bring them down. Amen.

Can you join me in that prayer?

v. 3 – Paul’s wasn’t trying to manipulate the Corinthians or put a “guilt trip” on them for the way he perceived they were treating him. It is fascinating to see this sensitive side to a man who is normally portrayed as strong and task-oriented. I get the sense that his feelings were a bit hurt over the course of events with the Corinthians. It is interesting that he wasn’t leaving this unmentioned, but he made it clear that this was a source of pain for him. What honesty! What transparency! I only appreciate Paul more as we read and study him. He was almost super human, but not perfect. His imperfections didn’t keep him from being a great leader, all the while working to build and impact the church of Jesus Christ!

v. 4 – In spite of all the problems, all the challenges, Paul wrote that he was greatly encouraged. Can you imagine that after all the disappointments and accusations, Paul was heartened! What was his secret? Perhaps it was the same secret that David discovered when things went badly for him:

And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God (1 Samuel 30:6 KJV).

The NIV states that David strengthened himself in the Lord. Do you know how to encourage yourself in God when there may not be anyone else to encourage you? If not, then your effectiveness will be limited.

Day Four

5 For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn — conflicts on the outside, fears within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

v. 5 – By his own admission, Paul was afraid! He had conflicts outside and fears inside. I find that remarkable and encouraging at the same time. If Paul was afraid and learned how to face his fears to be effective and productive, then maybe I can, too. Too often I felt that courage is action *without* fear, but it’s really action in *the midst of* fear. I am learning how to control my fears and not let them rule me. **How are you doing with your fears? Don’t think that fear means you are unspiritual. It just means that you are human!**

Paul was doing God’s work and still he faced fatigue, harassment, conflicts and fears. If that was the norm for Paul, what do you think your norm will be? It is so important that you not maintain a false standard of spirituality that states that you will always be on top of every situation.

Paul was far from Corinth and concerned about their spiritual condition. Yet God did not give him too much to bear. God may put you in a tough place, but never with more than you can handle as Paul reminded us in 1 Corinthians:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

v. 6 – Paul’s encouragement came in the person of Titus, who brought a good report from Corinth to Macedonia. The Corinthians were indeed responsive to Paul and concerned about him. They were also taking his advice to heart. I want to do what Titus did in that instance, bringing encouragement to those with whom he worked. I am reminded of three verses in Proverbs when I consider what Titus did here for Paul:

1. Like the coolness of snow at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters (Proverbs 25:13).
2. Many a man claims to have unfailing love, but a faithful man who can find? (Proverbs 20:6).
3. He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored (Proverbs 27:18).

While we can refresh those around us, I wonder how much of this dynamic exists between Jesus and His servants and messengers in the Church. If I faithfully carry out my duties that God assigns and bring back a good report, I wonder if I can refresh God’s heart? Is that possible? I don’t think we consider the joy that God has when we faithfully serve Him. Can you make that your goal? Can you refresh the soul, so to speak, of your heavenly Master? If that is possible, and I believe it is, then I want to be one who does that on a regular basis. Can you list the things and attitudes you can do and have that will bless God?

Day Five

8 Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it — I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while— 9 yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

v. 8 – Paul was referring to First Corinthians, in which he sharply rebuked and scolded the church and leaders for their lax ways and attitudes. Paul did at first regret the fact that his letter caused them pain, but he felt it was the only way he could make the impact that he needed to make to get the response he needed to see.

His letter did indeed hurt those to whom it was sent. I suppose that is what Paul referred to in Ephesians 4:15 as “speaking the truth in love.” Even though he was writing and speaking face-to-face, the principle was the same. Earlier in my career, I referred to that verse regularly, since I was a person who would speak directly to people, sometimes offending and hurting them. I hid behind that verse, so to speak, until one day I realized that I didn’t have a lot of love and certainly didn’t have all the truth. So I softened my ways and worked to incorporate more of God’s love and grace in my work and life. After all, I’m not the apostle Paul nor do I operate in same level of love that he did.

Yet this doesn’t mean that you can never share what you feel and sense with others, even if what you have to say may be hard and even hurt those to whom are speaking. It is my experience that there are many people who need to have a heart-to-heart talk with others, even their leaders, but are afraid to do so. **Is there anyone with whom you need to have a talk to air your views and share your feelings? Then I encourage you to do so as soon as possible. Only write a letter or send an email if there is no other way you can have your one-on-one with that person.**

v. 9 – There are some who try to be nicer than God, never hurting anyone’s feelings. I’m not sure that is possible if you are serious about doing God’s will and having godly relationships. Sometimes the pain we cause is the very thing that drives that person to God. And I assume that the process will cause you to press into God as well. It is like raising children; there are times that you must inflict pain so that they can grow and learn. It isn’t pleasant, but it’s part of life and growth. Often spiritual people have assumed that, when this happens, it is a sign that Christian love is lacking. But remember what Proverbs teaches us:

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses (Proverbs 27:6).

v. 10 – We see in this verse that there is a difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Both are painful, but only one has a redemptive outcome. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and life, worldly sorrow leads to hopelessness and death. When I consider this process, I think of a road sign that is sometimes posted at construction sites: ***Temporary inconvenience for permanent improvement.*** There are times in our relationships where we must go through short-term pain for long-term growth and development. If we short-cut the pain, then we also short-cut the growth.

When I avoid this pain, I can say it is because I want to spare the other person. Often it is because I want to spare myself. Are you protecting yourself from the pain of honesty and confrontation in any situation or relationship at this point in time? If so, what are you prepared to do about it?

Day Six

11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what

readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. 12 So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. 13 By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.

v. 11 – I assume that Paul referred to the situation where the man was living with his stepmother, as described in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul had expressed indignation that the leaders and church allowed this to take place. After he expressed himself, however, he wasn't sure whether he had done the right thing or had gone too far. Now he saw that the Corinthians had taken the matter to heart and were ready to deal with it. Derek Prince used to say that there are two kinds of churches: those with problems and those who confronted and dealt with their problems. Thankfully the Corinthians fell into the latter category.

It seems that Paul wondered whether the church had colluded with the perpetrator by ignoring the situation, thus enabling it to take place. Now he saw that this wasn't the case. Paul was glad to hear from Titus that the church was diligent to confront this sinful condition.

v. 12 – We must keep in mind that the Corinthians had no spiritual heritage like the Jews had. Their heritage was paganism, which allowed all manner of immorality. So Paul had to impart a strong sense of spiritual discipline and teach sensitivity and awareness to immorality and sin. That required that he keep the Corinthians under close care lest they be led astray by their lack of spiritual experience. So he wrote at least in part to test them to see if they were still with him, still under his pastoral care and responsive to his word and direction.

The good news was that they were. They recognized that Paul had a unique role among them, a role that no one else could play. So they responded and that made Paul happy and gave him a sense of relief.

v. 13 – Paul had a small team upon which he drew for spiritual assistance in carrying out his work. Timothy and Titus were the principle helpers in this group. Paul was encouraged to see how encouraged Titus was. The Corinthians had not given Titus a hard time, but had proved to him that they were serious about carrying out the directives that Paul had sent them in his letter.

I notice here that Paul deliberately changed the tone and tenor of his words. Where he rebuked in the first letter, he encouraged in the second. Paul used wisdom as he worked. You and I need wisdom as well to do what God wants us to do. For me, that is why I study the book of Proverbs. It helps me obtain the insight I need to do the work at hand. **Why not consider a study of Proverbs along with these studies? There are 31 chapters in Proverbs, so if you read one chapter every day, you will finish Proverbs 12 times a year, or once a month.**

Day Seven

14 I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. 15 And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling. 16 I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.

v. 14 – Paul told Titus about the Corinthians love and gifts and they had lived up to his reports. Paul was relieved to hear Titus’s report of his time there. Paul was such a great man, but he was so human. He was concerned that he had painted an inaccurate picture of the Corinthians and that they would not live up to his report. I find a study of Paul’s humanity so refreshing because I have often pictured him in my mind as a near-perfect man, St. Paul. He was a great man, but not perfect. His sainthood wasn’t based on his perfection, but on his commitment to Jesus and the work of the gospel. He didn’t do his work perfectly, but he did it wholeheartedly. You and I can only do the same.

If Paul wasn’t perfect in his work, but had his frailties and weaknesses, then you and I will do our work with the same limitations. That doesn’t mean God can’t or won’t use us mightily.

v. 15 – Titus appreciated the Corinthians for the way they received him, but especially for the way they received the letter and the instructions therein. I suppose every leader wants to feel like he or she is received and their work valued. **Do you value the work of your leaders? Do you take their presence and work seriously? Do you attempt to apply what they say and see to your life and work? Can you receive them as you would receive the Lord who sent them?**

v. 16 – Paul now had confidence that he could speak for and about the Corinthians and his words would be true. They would carry out what he said and walk in what he had taught them. It is important that those for whom you work or minister have confidence in you and your ability to carry out the covenant agreements that you have made concerning performance and behavior. **Is that true in your case? Do those with whom you work have confidence in you, your faithfulness and commitment? If not, what can you do to improve?**