

## 2 Corinthians 7 – Chapter Study

### Intro

#### I. Greeting • 1:1-11

#### II. Paul's Ministry • 1:12-7:16

##### E. *The Corinthians Exhorted* • 6:11-7:16

##### 1. To open their hearts to Paul • 6:11-13

As we pick it up in ch. 7, we do so in the middle of a thought.

Paul's reviewing the major trial they've all just come through.

It had been a long season of tension between he & the Corinthians.

They'd fallen prey to an attack on his calling & credibility by one of their members who was in gross sin & needed to be evicted from fellowship. Instead of following Paul's instructions, they'd sided with the evil-doer & opposed Paul.

After a visit there that didn't go at all well & a follow up letter that was really harsh, they finally came to their senses, disfellowshipped the wrong-doer, & repented toward Paul.

In this section, Paul encourages & urges them to be restored completely to him.

He knows they will think he might still be put off & defensive, so he writes to let them know he holds no grudge.

On the contrary, his heart is wide open . . .

**6:11 O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open.**

Keep that in mind as we pick it up in ch. 7 because Paul is going to urge them to *open their hearts to him*.

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Though we covered it last week, let's pick it up with v. 1, which *concludes* the final verses of ch., 6.

##### 2. To separate themselves from unbelievers • 6:14-7:1

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

The promises Paul refers to were the pledge of God's presence among His people in all their trials.

As he looked back over all they'd been through, Paul knew God was at work to accomplish something significant.

Because God was present among them he exhorts the Corinthians to take advantage of each moment to strip away anything unworthy of God & to press into godliness.

Then he says . . .

##### 3. To be assured of Paul's love • 7:2-16

**2 Open your hearts to us.**

Paul had opened his heart to them. It was only proper they'd reciprocate & open their heart to him.

But he knows what keeps people from opening their hearts is the fear of betrayal, the fear of getting hurt. So he says -

**We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.**

Of course, the Corinthians knew this!

Paul had never done anything to harm or hurt them.

He'd never betrayed their confidence or given them reason to mistrust him.

Paul was zealous to be restored to the estranged Corinthians.

The long-running conflict that had gone on between them was now over.

But Paul wanted to make sure the relational closeness that had once marked them was renewed.

That's why he tells them in 6:11 that his heart was open to them and asks that they open now to him.

In order for genuine communion to take place, we can't be guarded.

We can't hold back and hold off.

We can't close up our hearts & merely wear a smiling face.

True fellowship can only transpire when we open up and allow ourselves to be vulnerable.

In order to genuinely be blessed by a relationship, we have to be in the place where we can be hurt, where we *give enough of ourselves* that what the other person DOES with it will affect us.

Paul had kept himself open to the Corinthians. He now urges them to open themselves to him.

**<sup>3</sup> 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.**

This reveals Paul's forgiving nature, a nature that had been changed by the grace of God.

The first time we see Paul he's presiding over the stoning of Stephen – not exactly the paragon of forgiveness.

But here Paul shows that throughout the difficulties between them, when the Corinthians were saying all manner of false things about him, Paul didn't condemn them.

Reconciliation had always been his desire & aim.

**<sup>4</sup> 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.**

He wants the Corinthians to know that it was his zeal to be reconciled to them that had moved him to speak so bluntly both on his previous visit and in his last letter.

Something serious was at stake so he didn't mince words.

And the whole time they were going through their season of difficulty, Paul had never bad-mouthed them to others.

On the contrary, his reports to others about the church at Corinth had been only complementary.

He hadn't made anything up, but he had limited his words to that which was praiseworthy among the Corinthians.

This is an important principle as it relates to how we speak about others.

If we're engaged in a conflict of some kind with a brother or sister - we ought to limit the hard stuff to the interaction with them as we press toward reconciliation.

When it comes to what we say about them to others – if you can't saying something nice, don't say anything at all.

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Throughout the ordeal with the Corinthians, while it had distressed Paul greatly, as we'll see in just a moment, he was comforted by the fact that ultimately, God was in control and it would all work out.

We'll come back to that in a bit.

**<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, <sup>7</sup> 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.**

Paul had been in Ephesus, from which he wrote the previous letter; not 1 Corinthians but the one we don't have. He sent it via Titus one of his assistants. They agreed to meet in the port city of Troas at a certain time. [map] When the time came, Paul went but when Titus didn't show, he grew concerned.

Even though some great ministry was happening in Troas, Paul set sail for Macedonia, thinking to intercept Titus as he made his way back to Troas. They ended up meeting in Philippi where Titus gave him the good news of the Corinthians' repentance.

In fact, that's why he was late; he stayed in Corinth longer than expected to witness the steps of repentance they were taking.

Paul *admits* that while he waited, he was filled with anxiety.

His previous letter had been, well—pretty strong in its call for them to repent. Since his previous visit had not gone well & he'd left with the Corinthians *still at serious odds* with him, he was concerned over how they'd react to his letter.

When he arrived in Philippi & was waiting for Titus, he faced some opposition, *probably* from the same group that had made life difficult for him last time he was there.

In Acts 22 we read of Paul's initial visit to Philippi.

He ran afoul of the city magistrates & ended up leaving town in an uneasy truce.

But now that he was back, they were making life difficult again.

Then Titus arrived with the good news of the Corinthians repentance & steps toward being reconciled with Paul.

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What ought to be of great comfort to all of us is Paul's frank admission here of his anxiety.

He says in v. 5 "Outside were conflicts, inside were fears."

When we place that alongside v. 4 where he says he was filled with comfort we

realize the life of the one who follows Jesus is an ebb & flow of emotions.  
Being a Christian doesn't mean being a stoic, unmoved by emotion.  
We who've put our trust in Jesus have emotions like everyone else,  
We're subject to sorrow & joy just like them.  
We know what it's like to be distressed & comforted.  
We don't move dispassionately through life, detached from the feelings of  
normal men & women.

The great saint Paul was anxious about how the Corinthians would react to his  
letter and couldn't; wait for Titus to give his report.

Yet through it all, even in the midst of his concerns, Paul knew God was in  
control and would work all things together for good.

He knew that *what looks right now* like bad news, even a great loss, in God's  
gracious hands will turn out to be blessing.

Let's learn from our brother Paul here & be realists.

Life's going to throw us some curves & we're going to know times of anxiety  
& sorrow.

It's not sin to be fearful or sad.

It's only sin when we stay there- when we resign ourselves to it.

It's only sin when we allow it to create doubt toward God.

Anxiety & sorrow can actually be turned to good when instead of doubt, it  
throws us back to the place of trust in God – that He's going to redeem  
us. that he's going to resurrect good from it.

Saints aren't people who've never been tried, never known fear.

They're people who've conquered them!

Saints are men & women whose faith has been tested, sorely tried, and come  
through to the comfort & confidence of the goodness of God.

**<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.**

V. 8 is a classic case of hindsight.

As Paul wrote this, he wasn't sorry about writing the previous letter.

But it was sorry he wrote it before Titus told him about its results. Now, Paul's  
stoked about it.

I've done this – written an email or letter, & sent it off, and as soon as it's gone,  
start fretting over it. Going to be taken the wrong way, Too harsh. Said  
something that will be twisted.

Then the person I sent it to replies and says “Thanks” for it. Phew!

Other times I've sent off what I thought was a marvelous example of elocution – a  
powerful tome of correction, or comfort.

The person sends back a scathing denunciation – questioning if I'm even  
saved!

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When the Corinthians read the letter from Paul Titus brought, it hurt.

But the hurt moved them to ask if what he said was true.

They realized it was and they had some important changes to make.

**10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.**

There are 2 kinds of sorrow – *godly sorrow* & *worldly sorrow*.

Godly sorrow results in *repentance*, worldly sorrow produces *regret*.

*Repentance* has 2 movements; one is *away from sin, the* other is *toward God*.

*Regret* has only 1 movement, it simply moves a person away from one sin to another.

Worldly sorrow regrets the *consequences* of a particular sin, not the sin itself.

That regret is a pain that causes them to “learn their lesson” and decide not to do it again.

But instead of learning the deeper lesson sorrow is meant to teach – that there’s something broken *within* them, they simply move to some other sin.

They may even reform their behavior & become more moral – but they never come to dependence on God. They never ask Him to heal the inner brokenness that keeps them in bondage to sin & death.

Godly sorrow is more than regret for the consequences of sin.

It’s more than saying “That sin is wrong.” It’s the recognition, “*I’m wrong* because sin is *in here*.”

It’s turning not just from the consequence of sin but from our sinful nature & crying out to God for rescue.

That’s what the Corinthians had done. They realized they hadn’t just mistreated Paul, they’d been duped by the enemy into the place of seeing both him and themselves in the wrong light.

When they repented, they realized all the things they needed to do and had set to work to do them.

They disfellowshipped the guy who started the whole thing when he refused to repent.

Then they sent Titus to Paul with an urgent message that they loved him and hoped he forgave them.

**11 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.**

Hey listen – that’s what true repentance does – it zealously proves itself and answers its honest critics.

**12 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.**

Paul wants to make sure everyone knows *why* he had sent them the previous, difficult letter.

He did it because he knew it was right in the sight of God.

**13 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. 14 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. <sup>15</sup> And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. <sup>16</sup> Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.**

Titus knew things between the Corinthians & Paul weren't good and that he carried a letter heavy with rebuke.

But Paul had painted a positive picture of the Corinthians, so Titus went to them not really knowing what to expect.

That they had responded so marvelously to Paul's rebuke affirms the praise Paul had heaped on them.

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Here's what we glean from all this – as the followers of Christ, it's crucial we place a *premium* on being right with one another.

None is perfect; we all have things in which we err.

There will be times of conflict & difference.

But we must be diligent to do what we can to be reconciled to one another.

In Romans 12:18 we're told –

**If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**

That means if you're at odds with someone, you do your best at trying to resolve it.

If they WON'T do their part, you can't make them – but you do what you can, and you keep doing it.

That's what Paul did.

That letter he sent he knew was the final attempt. If they didn't respond to that there was simply no more he could do. That's why he was so anxious to hear from Titus about their reaction & why he was so relieved in their repentance.

Listen the highest virtue- the greatest mark of spiritual maturity is love.

The love we're called to isn't dainty, delicate, finicky, fragile, or frail

It doesn't wear a spotless gown & white gloves.

The love we're called to is tough. Thick-skinned, intense, durable, determined!

It wears overalls & work gloves with stains & dirt on them.

Our love isn't manicured – it's rough & calloused.