

## 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:16

### On Holiness

(6:14-7:1)

This section appears to be an insertion in the trend of Paul's thought as can be seen in the verses before and after this section.

6<sup>11</sup> We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. <sup>12</sup> You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. <sup>13</sup> In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

7<sup>2</sup> Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.

It may be difficult to see why Paul inserts this section on holiness between his exhortation to the Corinthian Christians to be more inclusive in their relationship with others. Some have proposed that the papyrus might have been mixed up and hence this insertion. I do not think so not only as we believe that the Word of God is written by the Spirit of God, but also for the reason given below. In a later chapter Paul talks about the collection from the Gentile church to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. This action expresses the opening of their hearts to others.

Paul had just finished writing about the reconciliation that is in Christ and told them 'not to receive the grace of God in vain' (6:1), i.e. not to reject the grace of God. In other words, they were adhering to their idol worship which was a problem in the Corinthian church. So, before they could make room in their hearts to others, they needed to be reconciled to God and come away from their idols. This is the call to holiness. Accommodating others is not merely a social cordiality, but the outflowing of love, i.e. what the Spirit has engraved on the tablets of our hearts. This is a necessary insertion because in opening of our hearts to others we must not be enmeshed with idolatry.

This section is a call to holiness in the light of the problems that Paul was dealing with in the Corinthian church. The call to holiness begins with an injunction and ends with the reasons quoted from the Old Testament. This is completed with an exhortation.

### The Injunction Followed by Five rhetorical Questions.

Do not be mismatched with unbelievers.

1. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?
2. Or what fellowship has light and darkness?
3. What accord has Christ with Belial?
4. Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?
5. What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

We live in a culture where the above distinctions are blurred. Light and darkness are no longer distinct entities but they gradually merge from one to the other. Paul lists the distinctions but did not give any answer to his rhetorical questions. Some have used this to separate themselves from all who are not Christians, but it would be difficult to live in the world as our commerce and many services are held by those who do not acknowledge Christ. We are in the world but not of the world as Jesus is acutely aware of the conflict and prayed for us thus.

<sup>14</sup> I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17:14-19)

The contrasts are clear. The world is at enmity with Christ. We cannot go hand in glove with the world though we live within its structures. The conflict with evil is ongoing. It can be subtle and we can be easily beguiled by ‘an angel of light’. We need to be able to identify our modern-day idols.

**The Old Testament Quotations**

‘For we are the temple of the living God’ (6:16). Paul does not seem to be quoting from a passage in the Old Testament, but he is streaming together the trends from various passages as I have laid out in the table below.

<p><sup>16</sup> ... “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.</p>	<p><sup>8</sup> And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. (Ex. 25:8) <sup>45</sup> I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God. (Ex. 29:45)</p>
<p><sup>17</sup> Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,</p>	<p><sup>44</sup> For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth. <sup>45</sup> For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy. (Lev. 11:44-45)</p>
<p><sup>18</sup> and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”</p>	<p><sup>14</sup> I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. ... (2 Sam. 7:14)</p>

The Old Testament abounds with calls to holiness, i.e. separation to God. The call is because the creation belongs to God and He has decreed that the proper functioning of creation is in the way the creation relates with the creator. This relationship is a holy relationship and is often expressed as the father-son relationship (6:18). That is why the ultimate restoration of creation is through God’s only Son in order to fulfil this reality.

**The Exhortation**

7 <sup>1</sup> Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Our separation to holiness is because of what God had promised and done for us. Our separation to holiness is not to procure anything from God. It is the natural response to our Creator and Redeemer. The expression ‘...bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God’, may seem to reinforce the idea that we need to do everything to keep ourselves separate. However, we need to note that the perfection of holiness is not complete until the Parousia as Paul says in Thessalonians.

<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thess. 3:13)

What Paul is saying here is that we need to be vigilant against idolatry. A simple hobby can turn into an idol.

**2 Corinthians 7:2-16**

‘Make room in your hearts for us’ (v. 2). Paul is here continuing from where he left off in 6:13 when he asked the Corinthian Christians to open wide their hearts. In that last study, we noted then that the heart that is led by the Spirit over-rides the logic of circumstantial factors and expediency. Having given his all, Paul pleads with the Corinthians to do likewise and respond to the gospel. ‘... a heart full of love and affection expands, while one filled with selfishness and suspicion has a strong tendency to shrink.’<sup>1</sup>

This sets the tone for what Paul says in the passage. Despite the harshness with which he has dealt with the Corinthians, the thrust is for them to repent to God and he did it in love. ‘You are in our hearts, to die together

<sup>1</sup> R Martin, *2 Corinthians*, Word Biblical Commentary, (Texas, Word Books: 1986), 186.

and to live together' (v. 3) – such was the intimacy of that love. The minister of the word needs to have the freedom to speak the truth which may include the harsh word from God, even if it hurts. Note the bluntness with which Nathan responded to David when he sinned (2 Sam. 12:1-15). This freedom of action is only possible when it is love operating from within. As John says, 'There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear' (1 John 4:18). Of course, in so doing, one becomes vulnerable to an unfavourable response as Paul experienced here (v. 5).

Paul has written about his difficulties and sufferings before. He finds his comfort in God and also in the coming of Titus. Notice again how Paul links his affliction with comfort. Again, the comfort he finds is in Titus coming alongside him, the *parakalew* (called to the side of) we mention in chapter 1. Titus also finds his comfort in the Corinthian Christians who supported him in his ministry.

Titus was instrumental in delivering the letters from Paul to the Corinthians. It was a harsh letter and Paul had some regret (v. 8) in writing it at first – 'For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it— though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while' (7:8). The initial hesitancy and pain led to rejoicing (v. 9). This is because of the godly sorrow that results from the letter.

### **Godly Grief versus Worldly Grief.**

I want to spend some time talking about the 'godly grief' and the 'worldly grief' that Paul mentions here. The two phrases should be read this way.

'Godly grief' – to be grieved according to God's will.  
'Worldly grief' – grief according to the world.

The above is the way those two terms are written in the Greek. I want to present a few examples of these.

### **The repentance of Judas and the repentance of Peter.**

<sup>3</sup> Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, <sup>4</sup> saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." <sup>5</sup> And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. (Matt. 27:3-5)

<sup>75</sup> And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. (Matt. 26:75)

### **Compare the repentance (remorse) of Saul and the repentance of David.**

<sup>30</sup> Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God." (1 Sam. 15:30)

David's psalm of repentance – Ps.51

### **The repentance of the prodigal son.**

<sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' (Luke 15:21)

### **The result of godly grief**

The result of 'godly grief' in v. 10-11 is a passive process. The verb 'produced' (v. 11) is in the aorist passive tense. It is the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

<sup>8</sup> And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup> concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup> concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; <sup>11</sup> concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. (John 16:8-11)

This is the difference between godly and worldly sorrow. One is the result of the work of the Spirit leading to true repentance. The other is the result of our comprehension and judgment. John Calvin differentiates them with the terms evangelical (godly grief) and legal (world grief) repentance.

Others seeing that the term is used in Scripture in different senses, have set down two forms of repentance, and, in order to distinguish them, have called the one Legal repentance; or that by which the sinner, stung with a sense of his sin, and overwhelmed with fear of the divine anger, remains in that state of perturbation, unable to escape from it. The other they term Evangelical repentance; or that by which the sinner, though grievously downcast in himself, yet looks up and sees in Christ the cure of his wound, the solace of his terror; the haven of rest from his misery. They give Cain, Saul and Judas, as examples of legal repentance. Scripture, in describing what is called their repentance, means that they perceived the heinousness of their sins, and dreaded the divine anger; but, thinking only of God as a judge and avenger, were overwhelmed by the thought. Their repentance, therefore, was nothing better than a kind of threshold to hell, into which having entered even in the present life, they began to endure the punishment inflicted by the presence of an offended God. Examples of evangelical repentance we see in all those who, first stung with a sense of sin, but afterwards raised and revived by confidence in the divine mercy, turned unto the Lord. Hezekiah was frightened on receiving the message of his death, but praying with tears, and beholding the divine goodness, regained his confidence. The Ninevites were terrified at the fearful announcement of their destruction; but clothing themselves in sackcloth and ashes, they prayed, hoping that the Lord might relent and avert his anger from them. David confessed that he had sinned greatly in numbering the people, but added "Now, I beseech thee O Lord, take away the iniquity of thy servant." When rebuked by Nathan, he acknowledged the crime of adultery, and humbled himself before the Lord; but he, at the same time, looked for pardon. Similar was the repentance of those who, stung to the heart by the preaching of Peter, yet trusted in the divine goodness, and added, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Similar was the case of Peter himself, who indeed wept bitterly, but ceased not to hope.<sup>2</sup>

Paul spells out the purpose of his dealings with the Corinthians. It was in order that their 'zeal ... might be made known ... before God' (v. 12). The purpose was not to sort out the 'one who did the wrong', or 'the one who was wronged'. The issues involved are not the primary things, but repentance towards God. It is no good sorting out the issues involved as that would only lead to remorse. It is real repentance towards God that is needed and then the issues would be sorted out as the Spirit directs.

### **The joy of Titus**

Paul has regarded Titus, like Timothy, as his son in the Lord, 'Titus, my loyal child in the faith; (Titus 1:4). Titus was not merely running an errand on Paul's behalf. Like Paul, 'his heart goes out all the more' (v. 15) to the Corinthians. We have seen earlier how the coming of Titus brought comfort to Paul by his presence. And not only comfort but also joy.

Paul concludes here by affirming his confidence in the Corinthians. For us it seems strange that he is able to say this after having to deal with all the problems there. However, his confidence is not placed in the response of the Corinthians to what he has told them (as they hadn't responded so far), but in what God is going to accomplish in them. And such is the confidence we have in one another.

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<sup>2</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.4.