



## 2 Corinthians - Chapter Seven

- I. 2 Corinthians 1:1-7:16 - Paul's Defence of His Legitimacy as an Apostle (continues/concludes)
- I.f. 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 - The Temple of the Living God (continues/concludes)

### Summary of Chapter Seven

Verses 3-16 are very representative of the Pauline closing section. This is Paul's final attempt in these chapters to get his readers to accept the legitimacy of his ministry and open their hearts to him. The tone is conciliatory and confident. His intent in writing is not to condemn them but to help them see that they are in his heart to live or die. Expressions of joy and benefit predominate in this chapter.

There is also a glimpse into the reality of Paul's life, and indeed the Christian walk, in that it is not one of endless joy and perfect peace but that there can be turmoil and stress to be found in certain situations. This reality should give readers of this chapter hope that they are not alone in the darker moments of life and that others, including the great man Paul, have suffered the same stresses and strains that they have.

Yet the outcome is one of pure joy as Paul receives the long-awaited news from Titus that the Corinthians have come to realise the hurt they had caused Paul, had repented of their errors and keenly wanted to restore their relationship.

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

### 2 Corinthians 7:1

Cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, making holiness perfect. Holiness involves purification of all aspects of life, including how believers treat and use their physical bodies, as well as purity in the realm of their spirits, affecting their inward thoughts and desires. Peter had made a similar call  
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to his readership: <<Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'>> (1 Peter 1:15-16).

The fear of God, i.e. reverent obedience, is the only way of wisdom: <<Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling>> (Psalm 2:11), <<The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction>> (Proverbs 1:7), <<Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord>> (Proverbs 1:29), <<The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate>> (Proverbs 8:13); for the believer in light of the fatherly discipline of God in this life: <<And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children – 'My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.' Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it>> (Hebrews 12:5-11); and the coming judgment: <<For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil>> (2 Corinthians 5:10).

### I.g 2 Corinthians 7:2-16 - Paul's Joy at the Church's Repentance

Paul's account of his experience of waiting for Titus: <<When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said farewell to them and went on to Macedonia>> (2 Corinthians 2:12-13), introduced the defence of his apostolic ministry in 2:14-7:1, which the resolution of the story in vv.2-16 now concludes.

<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. <sup>3</sup> I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. <sup>4</sup> I often boast about you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction.

### 2 Corinthians 7:2-4

Make room in your hearts for us. Paul resumes the exhortation from 2 Corinthians 6:11-13. The Corinthians are to side with Paul and renounce the false teachers as he has stated in 6:14-7:1.

We have wronged no one, corrupted no one, taken advantage of no one. Paul once again asserts that the message he has brought to the Corinthians is the authentic Gospel of Christ that will lead them into salvation and will never hinder them in any way: <<***We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry***>> (2 Corinthians 6:3). The trio of verbs is surprising. Has Paul been accused of such things? There certainly would seem to be nothing in his life or ministry, or in the life and ministry of his co-workers, to warrant such accusations. Perhaps his rivals at Corinth had been saying that the Jerusalem relief fund was merely a smoke screen for personal funds that he was unwilling to accept overtly.

Paul's defence is simply to insist that the charge is without foundation. The fact that he had often gone without food, adequate clothing and shelter is eloquent testimony in and of itself: <<***in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked***>> (2 Corinthians 11:27). He certainly was entitled to be financially supported by his churches as seen in 1 Corinthians 9:1-14. But he waived such support so as not to hinder the Gospel of Christ.

I do not say this to condemn you. This signals the transition to a block commonly referred to in epistolary parlance as the body-closing section. In the Hellenistic letter this section functioned to underscore the reason(s) for writing and to further good relations with the readers. Often the latter was done by acknowledging the benefit to both parties concerned. Paul begins by reassuring the Corinthians that his purpose in writing is not condemnation. He abandons the first-person plural that he has used since 2:14 and takes up the first-person singular.

The Greek word for condemnation, *katakrisis*, is a rare one, occurring only here and in 2 Corinthians 3:9 in the Greek Bible. It means to bring a verdict of guilty or to pass sentence against someone. Paul has defended himself at length and has made some strong denials throughout chapters 1–7. In retrospect, he is aware that what he wrote could easily have sounded as if he were blaming and passing judgment on them. So he is concerned that they not misunderstand his intentions. Indeed, there can be no room for condemnation because of the secure place that the Corinthians have in his affections.

For I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. When did Paul say this? No such statement can be found earlier in the letter, so it is likely that he expressed himself in this fashion either on his second visit or in a recent communication to them, perhaps in the severe letter. Refer to 2 Corinthians 2:3. Paul puts the more difficult commitment first. His union with the Corinthians is not dissolved at death in the way wedding vows are. Come what may, their destinies are inextricably linked, both in this life and beyond. Paul expresses himself in the classical formula of his day for abiding friendship and loyalty. It is a pledge that is also found in the OT. Ittai the Gittite's reply to David is nearly identical: <<***But Ittai answered the king, 'As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be'***>> (2 Samuel 15:21). Nor is Paul alone in making this pledge. The first person plural 'we' indicates that his colleagues share in it as well.

I often boast about you; I have great pride in you. Despite the heartache the Corinthians had caused Paul, his affection is clearly genuine, as it was for a church that seemed much easier to minister to: <<*For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?>> (1 Thessalonians 2:19).*

I am filled with consolation. The news Titus brought back from his visit to Corinth was that the church was duly repentant of not supporting Paul and for the emotional pain they had caused him. The believers there had seen the error of their ways and punished the individual who had publicly humiliated him on his last visit. So Paul has every reason to be confident that they will take the next step and give him their complete support in the larger matters that he is now calling to their attention.

<sup>5</sup> For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way – disputes without and fears within.

### 2 Corinthians 7:5

Paul picks up the narrative from 2 Corinthians 2:13; refer to the section introduction. The intervening passages have forcefully explained and defended his new covenant ministry.

Had no rest is probably another way of saying that he was physically spent from worrying. Then too, he had no chance of respite because when he came to Macedonia he faced opposition at every turn.

We were afflicted in every way. Paul does not provide any details about the harassment he encountered. The most he says is that it took the form of disputes without and fears within. The disputes without are undoubtedly some kind of persecution or opposition. It is known from Acts that Paul was pursued from city to city by a group of hostile, unbelieving Jews who stirred up trouble for him wherever he went. The fears within may have been related to his concerns for what Titus would say about the situation in Corinth, fears regarding Titus' safety on his journey to Paul, or indeed fears for the churches in Macedonia, which had always faced severe opposition and persecution, as the letters to both Philippi and Thessalonica indicate.

<sup>6</sup> But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of Titus, <sup>7</sup> and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. <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 see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly). <sup>9</sup> Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us.

## 2 Corinthians 7:6-9

Paul was consoled by Titus' coming because Titus reported that the Corinthians had fully repented and had turned back to Paul, and therefore back to the Gospel. Hence, the grief Paul had inflicted on them was worth it, for it produced repentance. Paul had been similarly encouraged several years earlier when Timothy arrived with good news of the Thessalonian church's steadfastness in the face of intense persecution and adversity: <<*But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us – just as we long to see you. For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith*>> (1 Thessalonians 3:6-7).

There were three sources of consolation for Paul here:

- The arrival of Titus, thus removing a concern for his wellbeing and a source of joy at being reunited with him.
- Titus' own consolation by the welcome he received in Corinth.
- The news that many in Corinth had responded positively to Paul's severe letter that had caused them a godly grief that had led to their repentance. This denotes not just a change of mind but a reorientation of the whole person.

Paul had found his second visit to Corinth to be a painful experience, during which he had faced humiliating abuse from his opponents. However, what had hurt Paul more was that the church had stood by and done nothing to intervene. The news of their repentance was therefore a source of pure joy: <<*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds*>> (James 1:2 NIV).

Mourning or deep sorrow, Greek *odyrmos*, commonly denotes wailing and lamentation, often accompanied by tears and other outward expressions of grief. In the NT it is found only here and in: <<*A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more*>> (Matthew 2:18). This depicts the deep sorrow and remorse they felt at having caused Paul such pain.

I see that I grieved you with that letter. Paul's severe letter had caused the Corinthians distress; probably with the reality of the pain they had caused Paul and some of the home truths he then had to make known to them. They were probably also filled with trepidation at what Paul might say when he did next visit them. Paul had felt similar personal distress when he wrote the letter: <<*For I wrote to you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you*>> (2 Corinthians 2:4).

I rejoice, not because you were grieved. Paul had not written the severe letter with the intention of hurting the Corinthians, or as a form a seeking personal retribution against the hurt he had suffered at the hands of some of them. His aim was always the restoration of their relationship with him and with God.

Paul would have known he was taking a huge gamble in writing the severe letter for it could have had two general outcomes: either a complete split between him and them; or the desired outcome of repentance and reconciliation. He had clearly prayed for guidance before writing the letter and had placed his trust in God for the right outcome.

<sup>10</sup> For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

### 2 Corinthians 7:10

Godly grief is characterised by repentance, i.e. remorse caused by having lost God's approval and the consequent resolve to reverse one's conduct and live for God: <<*So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord – for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil*>> (2 Corinthians 5:6-10).

Worldly grief is remorse brought about by losing the world's approval. This leads to a resolve to regain that approval, and this produces death, or divine judgment.

Worldly grief is that which turns in on itself and feeds off its ever deepening self-pity. It produces death because it breeds self-destructive resentment and bitterness that can all too often eat away at the person feeling the resentment.

The antidote to this type of pain and suffering is repentance, then seeking and offering forgiveness for the pain that has been caused. Seeking forgiveness opens the door to reconciliation; offering forgiveness heals both parties.

<sup>11</sup> For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter. <sup>12</sup> So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, nor on account of the one who was wronged, but in order that your zeal for us might be made known to you before God.

### 2 Corinthians 7:11-12

For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves. The Corinthian response to the letter was not one that produced resentment that could have exacerbated the situation but led to a constructive response on their part of accepting that they had been wrong. Constructive grief is the kind of sorrow that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.

What indignation. Their indignation was not against Paul but either against those who had opposed Paul, or more likely towards themselves for allowing it to happen without realising what was going on.

What alarm. They had clearly come to a realisation of the hurt they had caused Paul, the damage they would have done to the reputation of the church, perhaps a fear of what Paul would say when he next saw them and even the possibility they had opened themselves up to divine retribution.

At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter. It appears that Paul did not hold any animosity toward the congregation but recognises that they had been misled by Paul's opponents in this regard.

The one who did the wrong is written in the singular masculine and seems to point to an individual male, perhaps a ringleader of Paul's opponents. There have been many suggestions who this individual might be, such as the man having an incestuous relationship with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1). All of the claims are purely speculative and the individual remains unidentified.

The one who was wronged is almost certainly Paul, who faced a lot of abuse and humiliation during his second visit that prompted the severe letter. However, some commentators believe that Timothy may have taken a lot of flack during his visit that prompted Paul to go to Corinth, and that is the reason why it was Titus and not Timothy that was subsequently sent to Corinth to ascertain their response to the letter. However, the personal attack on Paul seems the most likely in view here, yet Paul is not writing to settle any score.

The Corinthians' response to the letter Paul wrote to them demonstrated that they truly belonged to God.

All of the Corinthians' actions are done before an all-seeing God, before whom Paul also carries out his ministry: <<*For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence*>> (2 Corinthians 2:17), <<*We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practise cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God*>> (2 Corinthians 4:2), and: <<*Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you? We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up*>> (2 Corinthians 12:19).

Before God is placed last in the clause for emphasis and demonstrates their accountability in this and indeed all other matters.

**It is clear from this passage that Paul's intention behind writing the letter had always been to achieve restoration and not recrimination.**

<sup>13</sup> In this we find comfort. In addition to our own consolation, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by all of you. <sup>14</sup> For if I have been somewhat boastful about you to him, I was not disgraced; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting to Titus has proved true as well.

## 2 Corinthians 7:13-14

In this we find comfort. Paul switches back to the first person plural that he had used throughout 2:14-7:2, indicating that his co-workers are also intended here.

His mind has been set at rest by all of you. This makes it clear that it was not just Paul that had concerns for the church but that his co-workers, like Titus here, shared his concerns. The implication is that Titus had ventured to Corinth with a certain amount of apprehension, perhaps due to negative reports that he had heard about the church. Such reports, however, did not come from Paul. He had done nothing but boast repeatedly. It is known that travellers from Corinth regularly made their way to Ephesus and may, from time to time, have brought disturbing news about the church: *<<For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters>>* (1 Corinthians 1:11).

It seems likely that Titus had been spiritually refreshed by the experience of his visit to Corinth, just as Paul expressed his own refreshing as a result of such visits: *<<so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company>>* (Romans 15:32), and: *<<Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ>>* (Philemon 20). Certainly, his mind would have been put at ease, for it was he that had delivered the disciplinary letter that Paul had written and Titus would not have known what reception he was to receive as a result.

Titus, however, was quite a capable deputy. Greek by birth, he had been converted at some point through Paul's ministry: *<<To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share>>* (Titus 1:4a). The first time his name appears he is a travelling companion on Paul's second post-conversion trip to Jerusalem: *<<Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek>>* (Galatians 2:1-3). He was also involved in the acrimonious exchange between the Antiochian leadership and some from the Pharisaic wing of the Jerusalem church who came to spy on the free exchange between Jew and Gentile in the church at Antioch: *<<But because of false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us – we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you>>* (Galatians 2:4-5).

The fact that Titus was selected for such a delicate mission at Corinth speaks volumes. That he would agree to visit Corinth after Paul's humiliating experience is remarkable, and the results of his mission bear marked witness to his abilities. Not only was he able to reinforce the dictates of the severe letter, but he was successful in reviving the church's flagging collection efforts: *<<so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you>>* (2 Corinthians 8:6). And if Romans 15:26 is any indication: *<<for Macedonia and Achaia have*

*been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem>>*, on his second visit to Corinth Titus was able to consolidate Paul's authority and bring the collection to a completion.

Just as everything we said to you was true is a reference to the Gospel message that Paul had consistently and truthfully proclaimed. Paul would never change the message in order to ingratiate human favour as some did, such as the Jewish leaders challenged by Jesus: *<<You like to receive praise from one another, but you do not try to win praise from the one who alone is God; how, then, can you believe me?>>* (John 5:44 GNT).

So our boasting to Titus has proved true as well. This shows that Paul had kept faith in the Corinthians for he had clearly boasted to Titus of them prior to sending him to see them and not just on hearing the good news at his return. Paul had boasted to Titus that the Corinthians were truly a work of the Spirit, and their response showed that he was correct, thus he could state I was not disgraced.

<sup>15</sup> And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of all of you, and how you welcomed him with fear and trembling.

### 2 Corinthians 7:15

And his heart goes out all the more to you. It is clear that Titus had given a lengthy, detailed and enthusiastic report about his time in Corinth and Paul wants to make the most of it in his response to the church, for Titus would be the one to take it to Corinth and would be responsible for organising the offering. Thus Paul prepares the ground for Titus in the way he frames Titus' love for the church.

He remembers the obedience of all of you. Titus clearly had fond memories of his time in Corinth and had enthusiastically shared the experience with Paul and the others. It is not clear whether it was obedience to a command in the letter, or a verbal one that he had passed on to them; or whether it is more generally their obedience to God through their repentance that is in view. What is clear is that it was universal in the church, i.e. all of you.

With fear and trembling is Paul's description of the Corinthians' response to God's call to obedience and his use of it include four of the only five occasions it appears in the NT. Paul had first come to Corinth with a similar mindset: *<<And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling>>* (1 Corinthians 2:3), calling others to copy him in this: *<<Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ>>* (Ephesians 6:5), and: *<<Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling>>* (Philippians 2:12). The other occurrence is with relation to the woman healed of menstrual bleeding, who had pushed through a crowd to touch Jesus even though she knew she was unclean: *<<But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth>>* (Mark 5:33).

<sup>16</sup> I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

## 2 Corinthians 7:16

The first section of the letter ends with Paul's affirmation of confidence that the Corinthians as a body are truly believers, as evidenced by their <<***repentance that leads to salvation***>> (v.10), and their obedience in v.15. Paul's expression of confidence in the Corinthians also includes confidence that they will do now what Paul asks, and thus serves as a transition to the topic of Chapters 8-9 regarding the collection of a generous gift from the church to help the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem: <<***You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us***>> (2 Corinthians 9:11). Paul's complete confidence in the Corinthians is further supported by the great confidence of Titus: <<***And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found eager in many matters, but who is now more eager than ever because of his great confidence in you***>> (2 Corinthians 8:22), Paul's 'partner and co-worker' (8:23).

Paul's relationship with the Corinthians is back to where it should be and he is ready now to proceed with the business he has to put to them. After all that has been said in the last few chapters, if they are not ready now to hear the appeal of Chapters 8 and 9, they never will be.