

1,29,26, 2 Cor. 7:1-16 The Father's Love Seen In Paul

2 Cor. 7 begins at the exact point where the last verse in chapter 6 ended; in other words, this is one of those times when there shouldn't have been a chapter break between 2 Cor. 6 and 2 Cor. 7. There weren't any chapter breaks in the original manuscripts because they were simply letters written by the apostles to churches and individuals. The chapter and verse structure was set up later to make everything easier to navigate; which was a good idea. But the breaks weren't always in the most ideal locations.

Here's our example of this tonight; 2 Cor. 6:17-18 (the last verses in chapter 6);

"Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you shall be My sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.

Now, here's the first verse in chapter 7;

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

You can see that this reads a lot better, and makes more sense, when all these verses are put together. The promises Paul mentions in 2 Cor. 7:1 are directly related to the offer of being in the family of God in 2 Cor. 6:17-18 (which we spent the last two studies looking at).

2 Cor. 7:1 is Paul's reaffirmation that the *experience* of familial love is conditioned on separation, cleansing and perfecting holiness. To have like-minded communion with each other requires a shared vision of who we are why we're here, and a willingness to commit to the implications of all that that means. Without those things, we are no more than a religious organization with competing personalities and directions – we aren't (quote) . . ." of one heart and mind."

Here's what happens when a body of believers are genuinely together in spirit as well as in fellowship;

(Acts 4:32-35) Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was

his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

Prov. 29:18 tells us that where there is no unified vision, the people disintegrate or fall to pieces – each one doing what's right in his own eyes. That's the opposite of "one heart and mind." It wasn't just compassion that made the early church so powerful, it was also their deep understanding of the purpose of God for the Church.

As long as Christ is genuinely more important than anything or anyone else, vision and unity can be preserved. In Rev. 2 that's called "first love"; which we are warned to never leave.

Most of us started out our Christian life with both a strong, let's say, "fixation" on our Savior, and we wanted, more than anything, to know Him and follow Him. Then the battle began, the world, flesh and devil started working on us to weaken, and if possible, destroy our occupation with Christ.

But we'll never experience, or re-experience, the spiritual fellowship of like-minded brothers and sisters as long as there is anything more important to us than the truth as it is in Christ. That's why Paul is so insistent that we identify anything that is "defiling" us; anything that is pulling us away from Christ and into the world or into religion. That has to be exposed and cleansed so we can get back to solid ground and the purity of a single-minded devotion to our Lord.

That's my personal belief on what Paul is asking the Corinthians (and us) to do in order to live in the spiritual reality of God being (quote) " . . . a Father to you and you shall be My sons and daughters."

All fathers want unity and spiritual growth for their "sons and daughters"; and they are heartbroken when anything comes in that sabotages that. As we saw in previous studies, from the very beginning of creation, it has always been God's

desire to have a family created in His image that He could love and commune with. Rev. 21:3-4 is a reminder of God's ultimate goal; a purpose and goal we need to always keep our eyes on when the enemy tries to pull us in different directions.

The tabernacle of God is now with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Paul adds *his* description of this in our passage by using the terms of "Father" and "sons and daughters". This is what God is after; it's what He will have when history has run its course; and the things Paul lists in our passage in 2 Cor. are a sampling of the things that can rob us of this experience in this life.

We're being asked to reject anything that does not represent the final outcome – the end goal of all the Lord has fought and sacrificed to obtain for us.

Even in the first century, as evidenced by the letter to Ephesus in Rev. 2, much of Christianity had drifted away from the family of believers sharing the common vision and commitment we saw in Acts 4; they had become more of a social organization run by charismatic leaders. The family is still there, but compromise and contrasting visions and purposes had brought in division and competition.

This is obviously true in our generation also. Satan's efforts to destroy the Lord's plans never stop, so the Church has to (as the saying goes) "stay focused" and vigilant, and not give ground to anything that pulls us away from our purpose here.

We could ask, 'why family instead of nation or race?' 'Why was man ultimately intended to express God's image in the form of a family?'

We won't go back over all of it now, but if you remember what we learned in John 17, you know that the relationship between the members of the Trinity is more like a family than anything else. The Father/Son relationship we see when we look at the deepest thoughts and prayers of Christ in John 17 show us more about the kind of relationship that exists in the Godhead than anything anywhere in the Bible.

All of our Lord's prayers were focused on a plea to the Father to make sure that the oneness that the Triune Godhead had with each other would be replicated in all who came to Christ and were born into His family.

There is a real sense in which this is what Paul meant by his desire for Christ to have *His* inheritance in us; *not just our* inheritance of eternal life in Him.

Here's Spark's expansion on this;

(Ephesians 1:18) "I pray... that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of *His* glorious inheritance *in* the saints."

What is Christ's inheritance in the saints? What are the riches of the glory of Christ's inheritance in the saints? It is that the saints are to provide Him with the means of the universal manifestation of Himself. It is a part of the arrangement in the counsels of the Godhead, that the Son shall be the central fullness, but that the fullness should not be manifested, displayed in an isolated way. There would be no purpose in that, because He could have done that in Deity without incarnation, He could have possessed the fullness in that way, and that is what the letter to the Philippians says. He was equal with God, and had all the fullness, but He emptied Himself. Why? In order that others might be brought into the fullness, that He might not hold it all for Himself.

The Lord Jesus let go in order to bring others in. The apostle says, "Let this mind be in you." If any of you are inclined to stand for your own rights, on your own ground, to hold things for yourself, you are violating the very spirit of Christ who let go His own rights in order that others might come into them and get the benefit. So, the inheritance of Christ is this: that He is made heir of all things, but He can have all things only as He has the saints, and He gets those "all things" through and in the saints. It is a part of the arrangement, the agreement. It is not as one isolated unit in God's universe, that He is to have everything, but in a corporate sense, and not only in a personal sense.... The Lord is not satisfied with His people just being saved,

and the Lord is not satisfied that people should just remain saved. The Lord has fixed this as His goal: the full knowledge of Him. It is indispensable to the Lord. His inheritance is bound up with it. The need today is that the Lord's own people should come into a knowledge of Him which they do not possess, into a position in relation to Him which they do not occupy; in a word: into the full knowledge of Him.

And based on what we've seen in 2 Cor. and John, all of this is in order that the full knowledge of Christ would find expression in us in the form of an eternal family encompassed by the love of the Father, Son and Spirit.

If all that we've seen can become *our* vision and purpose as it is His, it can have a significant effect on how we see each other and it can add a great deal of clarity to both the ways of God in our lives in time and the hope we have for what our destiny is going to be in eternity.

We know what it cost Christ to make this happen. It makes no sense to doubt our Savior's motive behind the mysteries that fill our lives with questions. If what we're experiencing wasn't designed by perfect love and infinite wisdom, it wouldn't be happening.

Ok, Paul's next instructions to the Corinthians take the reality of the family of God to a more personal level in vs's 2-7;

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. 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.

You can feel Paul's longing to have a much deeper relationship with the Corinthians than they have been willing to have with him. Paul appeals to them for transparency, for openness.

He says that his motive has been pure; only love for them. He hasn't corrupted or cheated them. And even when he knows he has to correct them for things they were doing, he wants them to know that it hurts him too and that it's never intended to condemn them. He says he desires to have such an intimate comradery with them that he would be willing die and live with them in everything they went through.

And then he lists evidences for his genuineness in all this; starting with the personal, inner pain he was experiencing knowing that his letter to them may have made some sorrowful. When most people criticize or correct others, they don't worry much about whether their criticism may have hurt the feelings of the ones they corrected.

And then when Titus told Paul how well the Corinthians responded to his letter, Paul rejoiced rather than simply settling back into a place of personal satisfaction that he was able to get them to shape up.

Families shouldn't lack confrontation when it's needed, but the motive should never be simply to make sure the other person knows they are wrong. Speaking the truth in love requires that compassion should be what drives any exhortation.

Something else that's woven into this part of chapter 7 is an extremely important principle we often overlook – it's vs. 6, "God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus . . ."

It can be a wonderful thing to have a kind of inward sense of God's presence and comfort when life feels like it's falling apart. But I'm sure all of us have experienced the "silence of heaven" – the times when we felt we needed a personal touch from the Lord, but nothing happened and our prayers felt like they were rebounding off an iron ceiling.

When those times happen, we sometimes forget that one of the more precious realities of a family who has God as their Father is that He may choose,

deliberately, to use a member of His body to comfort us; He may want to reach us that way to deepen our relationship with each other, as well as with Him.

He doesn't want us to overlook the value of each of us bringing Christ's life and light to us through one another. We're indwelt by His Spirit – we are *literally*, the spiritual hands, arms, and feet of the Lord.

God chose to ease *Paul's* pain by coming to him through Titus. I'm not sure who the author of this next quote is, but you'll see why I chose it. It shows us the value of interdependence within the body of Christ, but also explains why Paul spent so much time tying the necessity of personal suffering into effective service to others;

If you feel the Lord is handling you in a way that is bruising, using the flail on you, hammering, that's a hopeful sign. The Lord is meaning something more of value in your life for others. You know, friends, the idea has been very common in Christianity that it's a great and wonderful thing to be mightily used of the Lord: To be a great evangelist! To be a great teacher! Let me tell you, that's an entirely false conception! The truth is that those who serve the Lord most truly go through the deepest agonies of suffering... Balances are truly kept by God: extra suffering, extra usefulness; little suffering, little usefulness. That's how God keeps His balances. You may be having a more or less easy time, I don't want to dishearten you by saying it may not always be so, but if you really want to be of greater use to the Lord, remember it may be by a deeper discipline of the Lord. And if you're having a particularly difficult time, most likely it's because the Lord is going to meet the needs of others more fully through you.

In Col. 1:24 Paul himself said that he “rejoiced in (his) sufferings for (the Colossians) . . . suffering *for the sake of* (Christ's) body, which is the Church.”

In the next few verses Paul again “opens his heart” to them. Besides making a point, he's also setting an example of how self-disclosure to others can help free them to do the same for him. I don't know how often therapists share their own struggles with clients, and I'm sure it could get out of hand if it wasn't balanced right, but both for the sake of putting the other person at ease knowing they are

talking to a fellow-human, it can also instill some degree of confidence by showing that the counselor can personally empathize as well as professionally sympathize.

It appears that Paul feels it would be hypocritical for him to appeal for openness from the Corinthians if he isn't willing to do the same thing.

(2 Cor. 7:8-10) 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.

The key word in this section is “sorrow” - it occurs 8 times in verses 7 to 11. It’s part of what the Lord uses (in this case, through Paul) to bring His children from a place of ‘misbehavior’ to repentance (vs. 9, “... your sorrow led to repentance”.) In one of Swindoll’s books where he’s dealing with the difference between repentance and regret, he wrote;

Hebrews 12:11; ‘All discipline (like Paul’s severe letter) for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (and in the context of 2 Cor. 7:11, ‘the peaceful fruit of repentance’). When you have to rebuke, check your heart to make sure it is not to “knock them down”, but to “lift them up!” - Not to discourage, but to encourage them. – Not simply to eradicate the evil, but to help the good grow! Listen for God’s reproofs through your children, your parents, from teachers, coaches, counselors, from friends, from failures, from Scripture, from sickness, from losses, by disaster, by disappointment, because God’s reproofs come from a multitude of sources and they come in all shapes & sizes.

I found another author (Michael Andrus) who approached this from a different angle, but what he said was very helpful and it helped clarify vs. 10 which said, “...

you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.”

Paul is looking back at the situation and reminiscing. He had sent a bold and blunt letter along with Titus, calling sin “sin” and rebuking the perpetrators. It stung the congregation. I want to make a very important point here—it’s OK to hurt people (when necessary), but it’s not OK to harm them. There are times when parents need to hurt their children, but they should never harm them. Discipline hurts, but when it’s done the right way, it doesn’t harm. God hurts us often, but He doesn’t harm us. Paul’s hurtful letter was not easy for the congregation to receive, but neither was it easy for Paul to write. At first, he regretted having written it, but that was only momentary. Now he is glad he wrote it—not glad that they were hurt but glad that it produced the desired result—repentance, and therefore they “were not *harmed* in any way.”

This entire section is another reminder of the practicality of life in Christ. As important as it is to study the immense amount of theology in the epistles, especially the doctrines that came to us through the revelation given to Paul which were hidden in the Old Testament, it’s equally important to see the ways in which that theology is fleshed out in life.

When we began 2 Cor. I mentioned that this is the most personal epistle of any that Paul wrote. Everything he wrote to them was directly tied to the practical ways that a member of God’s family is to relate to each other in real life. It would be like the difference between Leviticus and Proverbs. The first is a breakdown of the Mosaic Covenant – the second is the intended application of that covenant to our relationships with one another and with the Lord.

That’s one of the most difficult things any student of the Bible faces – how to take the doctrines and principles, and be able to clearly see their application to daily life.

Paul does something similar by dividing his letter into two sections. The first section is the revelation of God’s eternal purpose in Christ and our place in that

purpose, and the second is focused on the behavior, the actions, that we would be expected to take based on the incredible realities of who we are in Christ.

These have to be balanced. Pastors can over-emphasize one or the other and leave the congregation either bored or confused. If 90% of the pastor's teaching is doctrinal and only 10% is application, eventually the people will have giant heads but no feet. If that's reversed and 90% of what is taught is a combination of application and inspiration with little to no solid doctrinal or theological instruction, the congregation will be extremely busy, but they won't know why they are doing what they're doing, or what God's intended outcome is supposed to be – they will be spiritually shallow and will lack vision. They will also lack the sustaining power of what the personal experience of awe and wonder at God's incredible purpose can do to a soul increasingly filled with light.

Now, in 2 Cor. 7:10 Paul wrote, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

The "salvation" Paul is talking about in this context is not what happens for unbelievers who come to Christ under conviction of their need for forgiveness. Paul is addressing the "saints" in Corinth. The word for "salvation" can also be translated "deliverance", which in this passage is referring to being delivered from both the dominion of the sins that were governing the Corinthian's behavior, and also stepping into a "change of mind" (which is the literal meaning of "repentance") that will set them on a different course.

It's like C.S. Lewis once wrote;

We all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest makes the most progress.

One commentator put it like this;

To what does salvation refer in this context? Since the Corinthians were already believers, Paul is not referring to their initial salvation (their justification), but to their present tense salvation or sanctification. Another way to view salvation is that in the context of a "rough" relationship between

Paul and the Corinthians, salvation is a restoration of their relationship or a reconciliation. Recall that the Greek word “soteria” conveyed other meanings such as deliverance from consequences of sin and subsequent restoration to a former state of safety, health, and well-being. That is part of the “fruit” of repentance.

We've seen the meaning and process that brings “godly sorrow” and puts us on the right road; so, what is the “worldly sorrow” that “produces death”?

This is from an online commentary on this;

The sorrow of the world—remorse, wounded pride, self-pity, unfulfilled hopes—has no healing power, no transforming, saving, or redeeming capability. It produces guilt, shame, resentment, anguish, despair, depression, hopelessness, even, as in the case of Judas (Matt. 27:3–5), death.

Godly sorrow, if delivered the way Paul delivered it to the Corinthians, is a temporary reality check that changes their course, but doesn't burden them with guilt. Worldly sorrow is one of the main tools the enemy uses to spiritually disable a child of God. The emphasis in the chastening of Heb. 12 is to correct, forgive and restore. The person who is chastened is free to move forward without being obsessed over what they've done wrong.

In Rev. 12:10-11 Satan is called “. . . the accuser of the brethren”;

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God, day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb . . .

The victory they (and we) achieve is by responding to all accusations, from wherever they come, by “the blood of the Lamb”,

(1 Jn 1:7,9) “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all

sin. . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Once our sin has come to light by the inner conviction of the Spirit, or through any of the mediators Swindoll mentioned, and we respond by agreeing that what we did was sin, "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

The saints in Rev. 12 took a stand of faith in passages like in 1 Jn. That's what brought victory over the enemy.

The enemy's goal, of course, is to discredit the blood of Christ – to limit its effectiveness in any way he can. He tells us that we're forgiven, but not completely.

He also likes to take that opportunity to remind us that what we did was simply an accurate expression of who we are. Then we have to choose whether or not we will let *that* take hold in our soul and potentially cause us to spend the rest of our lives in self-hate and despair, or we can choose to believe that the whole point of God exposing the sin we committed was not to use that as an occasion to "define us", but to remind us that through the new birth, as new creations in Christ, when we sin, we are *acting contrary* to who we are, not *revealing* who we are.

It's an ongoing battle and it's one which the "theology" that deals with the spiritual life can enable us to deal with. But only if we learn it and only if we believe it.

The last thing Paul wanted to make sure the Corinthians understood is how genuinely excited he was about their response. The language he uses is exactly like the language a father would use for his children in these same circumstances; Paul even throws in some statements that reveal how proud he is of them, which is another very "fatherly attitude" that surfaces at times like this;

(2 Cor. 7:11-13) 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.

If we take the exchange between Paul and the Corinthians as a pattern that should be followed throughout this Age, there are some significant unveilings of the Father's love in action through Paul.

First, Paul expresses immense gratitude that the Corinthians responded so well to his letter. This is identical to the parable of the Prodigal Son. The Father in that parable was so excited to see his son broken, penitent and returned to him, that He ran to him, embraced him, and put a robe of honor around him. That's the emotion we see in Paul in vs. 11.

Then Paul says something a little unusual, but again, think of it as 'divine viewpoint' (as the way the Lord views and acts on things like this);

(vs. 12) "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."

As important as it was to Paul (and as it is to the Lord) that the one who was wrong and the one *was* wronged are reconciled, the wording seems to indicate that the *most* important thing is that the Corinthians are able to see Paul's love for them in what he wrote. Paul definitely cared for them, but he wasn't sure they realized it – that it "appeared" that way to them.

So, again, transfer that to the Father's relationship to us. He's sacrificed more than we can even imagine out of love for us; He's written an entire Bible as a letter to us. Do we realize how much He cares for us – has that "appeared" or "dawned" on us?

Paul spends the last few sentences boasting about his beloved Corinthian children;

(vs's 14-16) 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.

These are William MacDonald's comments on this interaction;

When Paul says he had confidence in the saints in everything, we must not make his words say more than he intended. They certainly do not mean that he considered the Corinthians to be beyond the possibility of sin or failure, but rather they mean that the confidence which he had placed in them, and of which he had boasted to Titus, had not been in vain. Paul feels justified in having full confidence in them.

It was a great joy and blessing to Paul (just as it must be to the Lord) to be listened to and accepted by those Paul loved. Whenever we listen to and trust the Lord in spite of our own failures or unfortunate circumstances (the Corinthians had plenty of both), all it takes is transparency and turning our faces back to the Lord to bring *Him* genuine joy and blessing.

I know we usually want to know what we get out of all this, but this whole section in 2 Cor. 7 is a reminder that our God is not detached; He experiences the same joy that Paul did, and is more than willing to show His appreciation of our faith by wrapping as many robes; showering us with as many rewards as possible, when we see Him.

(Zeph. 4:17) The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

(Isa. 62:5) As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

He is going to boast and rejoice over us in the presence of all creation- and He will enjoy every second of that. So much so, that we will actually hear God Himself “singing loudly” out of His own pure joy and love of His children.

I can't even imagine what the best song every written will do to our souls when we are flooded with the beauty of it, especially when we know that it's not just entertainment but a glorious personal revelation of the heart of our Savior.