

Paul's Letters of Rebuke

2 Corinthians 7

2 Corinthians 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. 2 Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. 3 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. 4 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. 5 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. 6 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 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. 8 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. 9 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. 10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 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. 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. 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. 15 And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. 16 Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.

Background Notes

In verse 1 we read, *“Therefore, having these promises.”* So, once again, this verse properly goes with the end of the previous chapter, 2 Corinthians 6. Many Bibles show this with a break at the end of verse 1 before moving on to verse 2. Remember, there were no verse and chapter divisions in the original letter that Paul wrote, and clearly the phrase in verse 1 refers to the promises that were quoted from the Old Testament at the end of chapter 6. 2 Corinthians 6:16-18, *“As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘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.’”*

What is interesting about these promises is that in their context, they were given to the nation of Israel in the Law and prophetic books of the Old Testament. But in verse 1 they are extended to New Testament believers - not *instead of* Israel, but *in addition to* Israel.

In other words, these promises of the Old Testament that were made to Israel will be fulfilled - with Israel - when Israel returns to the Lord in the future. And, according to Romans 11, Israel *will* return to the Lord in the future.

In the meantime, the Lord is building His Church. His Church is composed of all believers from around the world, and the blessings of these promises made to Israel have been extended to the Church. However, *the Church has not replaced Israel*. The Church is distinct from Israel. The Church is unique - it is as the body and bride of Christ. However, in 2 Corinthians 7:1 and other portions of the New Testament, the Old Testament promises made to Israel have been extended to the Church.

As the spiritual seed of Abraham (according to Galatians 3:7), we Christians enjoy now - and in the future - all of the promises that were made to Israel, even the promises about the land of Israel in the future. After all, when we reign with Christ in His literal millennial kingdom here on this earth, Christ's throne and the headquarters for His kingdom will be located in Jerusalem, in the land of Israel. So as heirs of Christ, the land will belong to us as well as to the godly remnant of Israel!

But remember - the Church does not replace Israel! ***God's promises made to Israel will be fulfilled with Israel in the future.*** In view of these wonderful promises that are now extended to the Church, *"let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"*(v1). That is – we should practice godly living.

For the rest of the chapter Paul expressed his joy over the response of the Corinthians to his letters of rebuke.

Doctrinal Points

1. A proper rebuke should produce godly sorrow.

Verse 8: *"even if I made you worry 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 awhile."* What letter was Paul referring to? It was possibly 1 Corinthians, but probably another letter known as the "sorrowful letter. We mentioned that letter in our Talk on chapter 2. 2 Corinthians 2:3-4: *"And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears."*

Titus probably carried the sorrowful letter from Ephesus to Corinth. Paul was very concerned about how the Corinthians would react and respond, both to Titus and to his letter of rebuke. So he moved north from Ephesus through Troas, and then over to Macedonia in hope of meeting Titus returning from Corinth.

Until the coming of Titus, Paul he had no rest of spirit (v5). There were persecutions from without and anxieties and fears from within, no doubt because of his concern for Titus' wellbeing, and the response of the Corinthians to the rebukes in his sorrowful letter. At one point he even regretted that he had written the rebukes (v8).

“Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” Then Paul and Titus met – and what a relief, because Titus brought good news! Not only had the Corinthians welcomed and comforted Titus, but they had received the rebukes of the letters of 1 Corinthians and the sorrowful letter in the right way. The rebukes had resulted in godly sorrow and repentance.

Verse 7 says that the Corinthians were remorseful, and they did not have a bad attitude towards Paul for rebuking them. Verse 9 says that their sorrow was definitely godly sorrow, because it brought about repentance and change – and the apostle Paul rejoiced! Now Paul was glad that he had rebuked the Corinthians, because of the good results.

Paul assured the Corinthians that he had only rebuked them in order to help them (v3-4). He had rebuked them out of love for them, and it worked. The rebuke brought about godly sorrow and a change.

This is still true today. The proper rebuke from a parent to a child, or a church leader to a member of a congregation, or one fellow believer to another believer should produce godly sorrow. Although it doesn't always happen, a proper rebuke should produce godly sorrow.

2. Godly sorrow will produce spiritual growth.

A proper rebuke doesn't always bring about godly sorrow, but it should. Verse 10 says that if godly sorrow is the result of a rebuke, then spiritual growth will surely follow: *“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”*

Two kinds of sorrows are mentioned in this verse: the “sorrow of this world” and “godly sorrow.” The sorrow of this world produces *remorse* - but not *repentance*. Associated with the remorse are bitterness and callousness, and eventually death. Associated with godly sorrow is true repentance and salvation.

The salvation mentioned in verse 10 is not eternal salvation, because the Corinthians were already believers. This salvation was deliverance. They had been saved or delivered from all the problems that would have resulted if they hadn't repented.

Verse 11 says that their godly sorrow also produced indignation - probably indignation toward those who were undermining the apostle's authority. It may have been indignation toward the man who had been involved in sexual sin (mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5), who was possibly the man who repented in 2 Corinthians 2. He may be the one referred to in verse 12 as the offender. On the other hand, the offender may have been someone who had personally attacked or offended the apostle Paul.

In any case, both Titus and the apostle Paul rejoiced together because the Corinthian believers had showed the right attitude, and responded to the godly rebukes with godly sorrow. The godly sorrow had produced spiritual growth in the Corinthians, including reverential fear, and a longing and zealous desire to make right what was wrong. Godly sorrow will always produce spiritual growth.

Let me ask you – Is the Lord rebuking you now through a fellow believer? Are you reacting properly? Is it possible that they could be right and you could be wrong? Maybe they haven't shown as much tact and Christian love as they could have shown as they rebuked you, but they may be saying something that you have to hear.

What is your attitude? Is it godly sorrow? Or is it bitterness, and hardness, and defiance? Let's hope you're reacting to the rebuke with godly sorrow - because godly sorrow will produce spiritual growth.

Practical Application

Don't take advantage in the ministry!

In verse 2 Paul wrote: *"We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one."* Paul assured the Corinthians that what his detractors were saying about him were not true. **All** his motives and actions at Corinth had been *above reproach!*

Unfortunately, this is not always true in ministry. In fact, some people find it's easy to take advantage when they're involved in ministry. You can be lazy and self-indulgent in the ministry, but make it appear that you're doing a lot of work by writing glowing letters and reports. You can travel for pleasure - but call it a "ministry trip." You can raise funds, and then use the money selfishly, in ways that donors did not intend. You can manipulate people to carry out your selfish agendas by calling it "giving to the Lord's work."

Be aware! If you're supporting a ministry, check things out. Be intelligent donors. And if you're involved in ministry yourself, remember 2 Corinthians 5:9-10! **Don't take advantage in the ministry!**