

20260816 2 Corinthians 7 – The Call to Holiness - A Repentant Heart

**All Scripture is in NKJV unless otherwise noted.*

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 Corinthians 7:1).*

Paul begins with the word “therefore.” So we need to take a moment and figure out what it is there for. We see that by looking at the last verses of Chapter 6 which I covered in my last sermon. This is about bringing holiness to “completion” through/in the fear of God.

⁴ Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁷ Therefore “Come out from among them and, be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.”

¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, And, you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

Paul is declaring that God loves a repentant heart. Let me remind you that there are two kinds of holiness. One is better phrased as ‘justification.’ It is when, by an act of grace, God looks on you and me “just as if” we had never sinned. He looks on us and sees the blood of Jesus. We are made “holy” by the covering of Christ’s blood. That is not what Paul is talking about in these two chapters. He is talking about the holiness we practice as we live out our true identity in Christ. It is the opposite of living in the flesh. It is living a lifestyle centered on God’s desires for our lives. We are blessed and saved by grace which does indeed give us the right to be called His children (See John 1:12 which states “to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”) However, there is a closeness to the Father that is only experienced when we let Him have His way with us.

We’ve had religious movements that are geared toward holiness. This happened during the 2nd Great Awakening. A couple of those that arose at that time would be the Church of the Nazarene, the Disciples of Christ, etc. These were all wonderful attempts to bring Christians to a deeper commitment of personal holiness in their lives in living in obedience. But in time, as humans are so prone to do, they took this desire and codified it into rules and regulations to define what it meant to live more “holy.” This often became subjective and departed from a path of true holiness.

The danger is that these attempts, is that they often turn to legalism. Man begins to come up with rules which the keeping of will meet certain standards of holiness (at least in their own minds). These attempts always result in the flesh getting involved. By legalism, I am talking about the making of lists of do’s and do nots that may have little to do with true holiness in living. The old statement “I don’t smoke and I don’t chew and I don’t go with girls that do” is a humorous way that we try to summarize such lists. The truth is that there are only two children of legalism: (1) pride, and (2) self-defeat. The first says, “Oh, I’ve kept all of the rules so I’m really spiritually mature and all together (and consequently better than others).” The second

says, “Why should I ever even try to please God with my conduct because I always end in failure. Hence, there’s really no sense in trying.” Lets stay away from the pit of legalism.

As we begin, let’s remember a man who was chief among sinners. You might think that I’m talking about Paul, but I am thinking of King David. He is described in Scripture as “A man after God’s own heart.” That’s quite a shocker when you realize that he was an adulterer, a murderer, and a liar. Yet, it was David who penned the beautiful 51st Psalm in which he says:

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You. (Psalm 51:10-13).

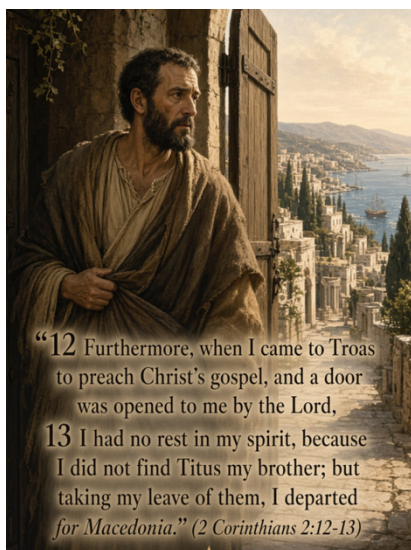
Fortunately, we as believers aren’t in danger of losing the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit permanently when we come to Christ. We do, however, run the risk of ignoring the Holy Spirit and operating in the flesh. Paul addresses that danger by commanding us to cleanse ourselves. That doesn’t mean to cleanse ourselves in the way that Jesus’ blood cleanses us, but rather to purposefully remove and separate ourselves from that which is not of God. In that aspect we are commanded to be “holy.” It is like he’s commanding us to clean up our hands and faces and change our shirt before we come to dinner.

The Corinthians’ Repentance

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. (2 Corinthians 7:2-4).

Paul now says that his heart is full because of how they have done just what he asked them to do in verse one. He had been hearing about all kinds of sin issues, and his plan was to visit them and confront them. Instead he wrote a letter out of “much affliction and anguish of heart,” and they responded in repentance. He is extremely joyful because of their response. They could have responded in many different ways, but instead of rebelling, they responded through genuine repentance. Repentance involves changing of the mind and changing direction. He sent Titus with the letter, and Paul was anxiously waiting for Titus at Troas to hear what was going on, and what the response of the Corinthians had been.

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. (2 Corinthians 7:5-7).



He says that he finally got to Macedonia, met up with Titus, and found out that the Corinthians had received his letter with a positive response. He was fearful about their response and says even while he was worried, the Lord gave him comfort. He was also comforted by meeting up with Titus. He comments that Titus was also consoled by the response that the Corinthians had given him. They were deeply sorrowful for what they had done and for what they had put Paul through.

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. (2 Corinthians 7:8).

Paul states that after he had sent the letter, he had regrets for quite a while, but then he didn’t because they had responded so well. Sometimes all of us second guess ourselves when we’ve done something that we think God wanted us to do, but then we think on it too much. Sometimes when we’re trying to “speak the truth in love” it doesn’t go over very well, and frankly we often do a poor job of trying to bring another believer to repentance.

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. (2 Corinthians 7:9).

Let’s stop for a minute and consider whether we allow ourselves to be “grieved to repentance” by the Holy Spirit. It is easy for us to ignore the promptings of the Holy Spirit. But we see here, that sorrow over our sins can be a good thing. People are racing and chasing after happiness with all of their might, and we are reminded that sometimes it is sorrow for what we have done that brings us to repentance. Sorrow for our sins and wrongdoings can have great potential and can bring us to a higher level of holiness in our living. But it won’t happen without REPENTANCE.

*¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces **repentance** leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10).*

We don’t always look at our sorrow as a good thing, but we learn from this passage that our sorrow sometimes brings a great result. It’s okay to feel sorry for our sins. It’s a good thing. The key between the two responses is tremendous. Godly sorrow produces a CHANGE OF MIND coupled with a heart that is willing to change. The difference between the two sorrows is REPENTANCE. If that is the issue, we should remind ourselves of the difference between the two. Repentance involves a change of mind and a change of action that follows it. Without the

change of mind, it will only lead to death. Otherwise sorrow can be just because we're sorry that we got caught.

S O R R O W	
GODLY	WORLDLY
Godly sorrow produces a change of mind and heart along with a willingness to change one's behavior. When coupled with faith in God, godly sorrow leads to salvation and leaves no regret.	Worldly sorrow does not progress beyond remorse. There are deep regrets over what has happened, but there is no accompanying change of mind and heart, nor any willingness to change, nor any faith in God. The result is death.

Greek Word: μετάνοια
Transliterated Word: metanoia
Definition: change of mind, repentance

There is a HUGE DIFFERENCE between godly repentance and worldly sorrow. Jesus spoke about this in the context of Jonah and the people of Ninevah.

"⁶ Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. ⁸ But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? ¹⁰ Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." (Jonah 3:6-10).

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. (2 Corinthians 7:11-12).

I have met believers who cannot say the words, "I am sorry." By this they would be admitting that they are sorry for what they have done. Yet the Corinthians were full of that kind of sorrow, and it brought Paul great joy. He says it is that kind of godly sorrow which produced a diligence in the Corinthians to clean out the garbage in their hearts and lives. He reminds them that the difficult letter he had sent them had a purpose, and it was a good purpose. He also reminds them that it should really have let them know how much he did indeed love them. This sort of reminds me of the old "this hurts me more than it hurts you" that many of us have heard. Paul concedes that his words might have hurt them, but it created great anguish in Paul as well. Yet, it all had a good result.

The Joy of Titus

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. (2 Corinthians 7:13-16).

The big idea today is that we often invite filth into our lives. My parents were medical people and the word “filth” was something they used often. Paul exhorts us to consider the promises of God. There are promises of having a sweet parent child relationship with our Father in Heaven. It might be good to think of this as an “extra measure of grace.” This is a grace that goes beyond the grace which saves us to a favor that can be upon our lives when we walk in obedience. Paul says we can experience this as we “cleanse the filth” out of our lives. That involves willful and purposeful separation. It is listening as the Holy Spirit tells us that this or that isn’t part of walking in holiness.

That filthiness can be in the body or in our spirits. That means we can participate in filth with our bodies or with our minds. As we are involved in this separation and cleansing, we enter into a mature holiness before the Lord. That is a holiness that is proven. That is a holiness that comes from walking in the Spirit and doing so in obedience. That means a holiness that is born out of our willingness to say NO to the world, and YES to Jesus and His will for our lives. Having heard this admonition, let us commit today to walk in it.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.