
2 Corinthians

Lesson 9

“2 Corinthians 7”

Objective: To explore the ancient text of 2 Corinthians in order to understand more fully and completely the call of God for us today as we seek to live out our lives in service to the Kingdom of God, to His glory, His Honor and His will. These ancient texts can challenge us, and inspire us, to live life more fully as participants in God’s story of redemption and love. At the core, the hope and desire for doing this study is that we will be continually transformed more fully and completely into useful instruments in the hands of God for bringing His message of love and compassion, and life to every creature.

Materials: The Bible, Commentaries, journal articles, dictionaries, the internet and other resources as may be appropriate. It is also our hope that each person will bring to the discussion and class times the things that God has placed upon their heart through their unique journey as people seeking the face of God and the life He seeks to bring.

Procedures

1. To explore biblically and logically what matters most to God in order to understand how we are to live. This will entail exploring the background of these texts in order to understand more fully their intended meaning for their original target audience.
2. We will also seek to explore how these ancient texts, addressed to ancient peoples, should, and must challenge us today in our walk of faith and obedience to the will of God.

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 - 3.** We intend in each instance to offer some practical suggestions as to how the call of God, through His Apostle, Paul, calls us to live our lives in such a way as to reflect our confident hope and expectation in the power of God. We seek the face of God.

Chapter 7 verse 1 begins by stating that, “Therefore, we are having these promises,” summing up the previous statements of Paul that deal with entangling alliances that at least some of the Corinthians were still engaging in even after expressing allegiance to Christ. In verse 18, the promises are that God will be the father and that the Corinthians will be the children of God. God will fulfill his promise of becoming the father of the Corinthians, but Paul here challenges them calling upon them to “cleanse” themselves. He calls upon to be a clean temple, a holy temple, dedicated to the purpose for which it has been called. Being sons and daughters of God means that they are to reflect the nature of their father, who is holy and committed to a singular track, a singular purpose. Paul is calling upon them to be like God who is perfect in fulfilling his obligations. “The holiness” that Paul calls upon the Corinthians to have is a “perfect” holiness that is motivated by a healthy fear, or reverence for God. Though this may not be a very popular calling it is a continual calling of Scripture.

It is in “fear and trembling” that Paul calls his audience to the path of “perfection.” So often today, we use the word “perfect”

in a sense that it was not intended to have in the writings of Paul. The word that Paul uses here indicates someone who is “consecrated,” or made “ready” for the task. In other words there is no wasted motion, or energy that would distract the full momentum of the people of God from fulfilling their role as the actual dwelling place, and intersecting point, between the realm of God and of heaven. We are called upon to be the new nexus, or intersection, between God and heaven. This was a task that was performed in the past by Garden of Eden, the tabernacle, the temple, and now by the linking together of the image bearers of God in a community amongst whom He dwells. The calling therefore, is for the children of God to fulfill their intended, created, function and to display the nature of God to the entire universe and all those that dwell in it. This task is not just to show other human beings, but even to show angelic beings the nature and wisdom of God. Surely, this is the highest and the holiest calling possible. This is something far beyond anything that we as human beings could ever even imagine, or hope to attain on our own. The vision here is for humanity to fulfill the destiny for which they were created. Our task, as children of God, is to strive

to be all that God has called us to be, and in this he calls us His children.

At 7:2 Paul continues the plea he began before the digression of 6:14-7:1 calling upon his audience to “make room for us” (in your hearts is not in the Greek text but is implied by the context). He is pleading with the Corinthians to open up and not to become hard-hearted toward Paul and his companions. He challenges them to do this based on the fact that he and his companions have not “wronged” (ἠδικήσαμεν) anyone; he says we have neither ruined anyone financially, or their faith (ἐφθείραμεν - the word here can have both of these meanings and Paul may mean for us to understand both here). In addition, Paul and his companions have not taken “advantage” (ἐπλεονεκτήσαμεν) of anyone. Paul is being very defensive in his writing here.

At verse 3, Paul softens his tone in case they misunderstand his goal. He has no desire to beat his audience into subjection, he wants them to understand his words come to them like those of a loving father pleading with his children to come to reason and understand that they are deeply and dearly loved and yet have been errant. In all of what he says, Paul wants his motivations to

be clear and transparent in order to counter the accusations that somehow he has been manipulative and deceitful. He wants them to understand that there is a connection between Him and his audience that is close and powerful. This connection is in fact so close and powerful that because of it Paul and his companions are in the process of “living” (σὺζῆν) and “dying” (συναποθανεῖν) together. Paul is here speaking to the Corinthians using plain, unornamented, speech that in itself is an indication of his closeness to them, his friendship with them. This is a mark of a very intimate relationship and in this speech Paul is not only expressing this closeness in the words themselves, but in the very plain and forthright manner of his expression.

In verse 4, Paul will go on to express the fact that he expresses “confidence” (παρησία) in them, even taking “pride” (καύχησις). He will then continue by spelling out exactly what it is that gives him cause for this “pride” in them and one might expect it to be based upon their service to one another, the community, or even their great standing in the community. However, Paul cites none of these things, but what he does cite as the motivation for his “pride” continues his message of reorienting

their compass in a manner that would transform their entire value system. His sense of “pride,” and “overflowing with joy” comes because of their “affliction” (θλίψει). Paul will expand on this as he goes through this chapter, but he uses this idea of affliction in a manner that causes it not to be seen as something negative or even to be avoided, but as something inevitable, and that comes as a result of their commitment to the cause of Christ.

At 7:5, Paul will recount to his audience what he and his companions faced as they traveled into Macedonia. The review given here gives only a partial recounting of his incursion into Macedonia. Perhaps it is the case here that for us to properly understand this section of the letter we need to give a recap of Paul and the Corinthian church that we uncovered in 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:13. In those verses, we find that Paul had apparently made an unplanned visit to Corinth, in response to problems that had arisen there. It was during this visit that a member of the Corinthian community had challenged Paul both publicly and personally, giving him much cause for grief. While it appears that the majority of the Corinthian believers seem not to have agreed with that man, they also appear not to have rallied

around Paul. Their silence appears to have allowed the minority to poison the atmosphere for Paul. Because of this poisonous environment Paul left the city and wrote an emotional, and forthright letter to the community that he most likely sent via Titus (cf. 2:1-4).¹

We are made aware from chapter 2 that the letter prompted the majority at Corinth to express their support for Paul and to discipline the person who had attacked Paul. One of the accusations that the minority apparently had made against Paul was that he was fickle, insincere, and talked out both sides of his mouth. They appear to have received some justification for these accusations when Paul changed his travel plans and did not come actually to Corinth (1:15-24). Paul, having concluded his initial response to the Corinthian community by calling upon them to forgive “his” attacker (2:5-11), then launches into an account of his travels, relating to them the opening of a door in Troas (2:12). He did this while he waited for Titus and news about how the church members had received Paul’s letter. Anxious for this news Paul then travels to meet Titus along the way and travels to

¹ Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, in the Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary series (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Incorporated, 2009), p. 141.

Macedonia (2:13). At this point in his travel details, Paul launches into a long defense of himself, his ministry, and his companions, aimed at countering the criticisms leveled against him by that minority that had opposed him and were limiting his influence in Corinth.²

At 7:5 Paul is now ready to take up the narrative that he left off at 2:13. As things turned out traveling from Troas to

Macedonia did not initially relieve the anxiety that Paul felt. He

indicates that their “flesh had no rest.” He writes to them that their were “disputes outside” while there were also “fears within.” The “disputes outside” might refer to the conflicts with Roman authorities, or problems in other church communities, or even both.



The map to the right gives us the geographical relations between Troas where Paul had been, Corinth where Titus had been, and Macedonia where Paul had traveled to wait on Titus when Titus

² Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, p. 141.

had not made it all the way to Troas with news regarding the reception of the letter of Paul to Corinth. The fears that Paul felt within are likely what compelled him to travel to meet Titus. In recounting his inward conflict Paul is likely trying to create an opportunity for the Corinthians to sympathize with him.³

Paul then shifts once again (verse 6) to a key theme in this letter indicating that God “consoles/comforts” (παρκαλῶν) the “humble” (τοὺς ταπεινοὺς). A part of this comfort was in the form of the arrival of Titus. At verse 7, Paul indicates that it was not simply in the coming of Titus that the comfort came, but also the message that Titus brings about how the Corinthian believers had responded to Paul’s letter. In his response, Titus tells them of the “longing” of the Corinthians; their “mourning;” their “deep sorrow;” their “zeal;” for Paul. It is in all of these things, that came as a response from the believers at Corinth, that Paul is “comforted” and “consoled.” The response that Paul had hoped for had become a reality. The response of the church in Corinth meant that there was a healing in the relationship, or at least that

³ Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, pp. 141-142.

there was a desire to heal that relationship. It was a message of hope.

Paul in verse 8, then breaks out in a conciliatory tone while at the same time clearly indicating that the letter that he sent was indeed necessary. He indicates that he did not regret bringing them to sorrow, because it was both brief and it also brought them to repentance as verse 9 will indicate. Paul rejoices not over their sorrow, and the pain that he inflicted upon them, but upon the fact that they had been brought to repentance. Sometimes we are so hesitant to confront others because we do not wish to hurt their feelings, or because we are afraid of damaging, or destroying our relationship with them. Paul pushes past such reticence and pushes ahead looking at more than the short term picture, but instead looks toward the long-term, on into eternity. For their (the Corinthian believers) eternal salvation, correction was needed. At the end of verse 9, Paul indicates that they were not “harmed,” and they did not “suffer loss” because of what God did in bringing them to godly repentance. Paul took the risk and good resulted in the long run from his compassionate correction.

At verse 10, the “grief” that Paul says leads to repentance is different than the grief of the world, the grief of the Corinthians is a “godly grief” (τοὺς ταπεινοὺς) that works to produce a repentance that leads to “salvation” (σωτηρίαν). He indicates that the difference between “worldly grief” and this “godly grief” is that the “worldly grief” produces death. Pain can be both a good thing and a horrible thing. People that do not feel pain damage themselves and do not even realize it. Pain serves a purpose in the right circumstances, and even at the right time. One of the Desert mothers taught: “In the beginning there is struggle and a lot of work for those who come near to God. But after that there is indescribable joy. It is just like building a fire: At first it’s smoky and your eyes water, but later you get the desired result. Thus we ought to light the divine fire in ourselves with tears and effort.”⁴

Paul makes it very plain, the pain of the Corinthians led to their repentance. We should be reminded here that as sin entered the world it entered as a breach of interpersonal relations between humanity and God. Repentance then leads to forgiveness which is a restoration of relationship. Paul has a deep longing for

⁴ Amma Syncletica, trans. Yushi Nomura, *Desert Wisdom: Sayings from the Desert Fathers*, 1982; repr., (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 2001) p. 26.

restored relationship with the believers at Corinth.⁵ The Gospel is about restoring relationship not only with God, but with people too. Sometimes we focus so completely on restoring relationship with God that we, in our zeal, destroy relationship with other people, with other believers. This is not what God wants. He wants our humility and our repentance to challenge us to strive for unity not only with God, but with other people.

Another element that Paul points out in verse 10 is the fact that “worldly grief” does no good, as a matter of fact it does harm, it produces “death.” Sorrow can have too affects: one affect is to produce a humility and a recognition of our need to cry out to God and to depend upon him. In this grief, a person turns outwardly toward God, while in “worldly grief” a person turns inwardly toward self and the focus then becomes so self-centered that it poisons the soul and ultimately leads not only to unhappiness and dissatisfaction, but ultimately to death. Paul here indicates an understanding of this, and a perception that not all grief is good and more than anything else what we allow grief to do in our souls determines whether it is a positive thing, or a negative thing. All

⁵ Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, p. 143.

people grieve, the challenge is what are we going to allow that grief to produce, repentance and life, or self-pity, self-centeredness and death.

In verse 11, Paul wants the Corinthians to see what their grief has produced in them. He is ever the teacher of his children and he wants them to understand. He wants them to understand that what they have gone through should produce a maturity that will enable them not only to deal with what has just happened, but will prepare them for the road ahead and the obstacles that are still to come. In this verse we need to be clear that Paul is reciting how they (the majority at Corinth) had responded to those at Corinth who had caused this problem to begin with, by attacking Paul. They have dealt with that person in a manner that vindicates them of blame and indicates therefore that they stand as guiltless before God. This response was something that was necessary and needed on their part. Its goal is to produce the same affect in the offender at Corinth as the letter had produced in the Corinthian congregation as a whole, repentance.

Paul indicates that his motivation in writing to the church of Corinth (verse 12) was not to cast blame on the one who had done

the wrong, but to draw out of them the correct response that he believed was there all along. Paul's motivation was to draw out of them this correct, and godly, response and it actually worked as Titus has attested to in the report that he has delivered to Paul (verse 13). In verse 14, Paul returns once again to very frank and forthright speech in telling them of the fact that he had been bragging to Titus about them. In this bragging, he, Paul was not disgraced and as he makes this clearly indicative of the truth, he links this fact to the veracity of the other things that he said in the letter as well. In the midst of his praise for the Corinthians he slips in a little bit of defense too.

At verse 15, Paul continues in his praise while at the same time giving his audience the details of the report that he had received from Titus. He highlights how they had touched the heart of Titus and that this touching of his heart is based on the obedience that they had shown. One way they had given expression to this obedience was in their welcome of Titus "with fear and trembling." This was a godly and respectful response that causes Paul to "rejoice" (verse 16) and to express "full confidence" in them. In expressing this confidence in them he is also laying

down a challenge for them to fulfill completely his expectations of them. He challenges them to carry on doing what is right and righteous before God.

Synopsis

As Paul writes in chapter 7, he sums up the previous section as he prepares to return to what he had been writing about before this short digression on holiness and the fear of God. At 7:2, Paul pleads with his audience to make room for them in their hearts and reminds them that no one has been wronged by Paul, or by his companions. He makes it clear that his motivation in writing to them is not one of condemnation, but of correction; because he thinks so highly of the Corinthian believers. Paul takes comfort in the fact that their (the believers) hearts were touched by his words and that his words caused them to reflect and even repent of their failures.

In the midst of this section Paul continues to defend his actions against his accusers and he explains his motivation for not coming to them as he had planned and for his travels. Paul expresses a love and a tenderness for the believers at Corinth that seeks to explain his motivation in challenging them to do the right thing and to stand up to those who had challenged him and his authority as well as the motivation for he and his companions to conduct their ministry. In the midst of this he indicates that the

Corinthians were grieved, but that it was godly grief that led to repentance and because of this repentance he does not regret causing them grief. He declares them vindicated as far as he is concerned.

He also expresses the great joy and comfort that he received as a result of the very favorable report that he had received from Titus. He tells them of his previous boasting to Titus regarding them and of how he is proud of how this boasting proved to be true because of their fine response in hosting Titus and being obedient to God. He ends this chapter rejoicing and with a “complete confidence” in them.

Questions

1. What are some things that you have been promised in your life that were fulfilled better than you could have expected?
2. What do you think Paul means by “defilement of the body?”
3. What are some ways that you strive for “holiness” in your life?
4. How would you define “perfect?”
5. How is the way Paul uses the word “perfect” different from the way you would normally use this term?
6. What are some ways that you have made amends with someone when your relationship with them has suffered? How did it work out?
7. Has anyone ever taken advantage of you? How did it make you feel?
8. Why do you think Paul would be overjoyed at the affliction of the Corinthians?
9. What are some ways that you find comfort in times of affliction?
10. How do you feel when people are in conflict with one another? Why?
11. What are some ways that you seek to deal with conflict? Why?
12. What do you think it means to repent of something?

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13. How would you define godly grief as opposed to worldly grief?
 14. What are some things that you like to boast about with regard to your children? Why?
 15. What are some ways we can express “obedience to God” in our relations with other people?
 16. What are some things that make you rejoice? Why do they make you rejoice?
 17. How would you sum up the message of Paul in this chapter?