

## 2 COR. 5:6 – 7:16

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### H. Confidence and Commitment (5:6-10)

1. Paul begins v. 6 by indicating that the truth of an eternal and glorious existence constantly provides them confidence in their ministry (v. 6a). He then interjects (v. 6b) that they know that life in this mortal body is, in some sense, life away from the Lord. In other words, mortal existence is actually a disadvantage in terms of intimacy of fellowship. As long as there is a home for the mortal body, the fullness of salvation is yet future, something that is ours by faith rather than appearance (v. 7). But on "that day," we shall see "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12) and "shall see him as he is" (1 Jn. 3:2).

a. Since Paul nowhere else uses the verbs "to be at home" or "to be away from home," he may well be taking over an image of his opponents to correct their use of it (perhaps connected to the Corinthians' penchant for overrealized eschatology) in the process of making his point that this life, what is presently seen, is not to be overvalued (i.e., one is not to orient one's life toward it - see, 4:18).

b. Contrary to his opponents' claims, to be at home in the body is not to be at home with the Lord (as they meant it). There is a fulfillment yet to come.

2. V. 8 makes clear that their preference is for life in the new age. They would prefer to shed this mortal existence (leave the body-home) and enter the consummation (come home to the Lord). If this is correct, it is the same sentiment as that expressed in *marana tha*. In other words, their eyes are fixed on the heavenly prize. (Also, if correct, Paul is not addressing the intermediate state of those who die before the consummation.)

3. That being their orientation, they aim to please the Lord in this life, however one may characterize it (as being at home or away from home).

4. After all, as v. 10 makes clear, all believers must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of the life they have lived. On that day, they do not want to be found unfaithful to the mission which had been entrusted to them. God will evaluate the lives and ministries of his children and reward them accordingly.

### I. Motivation for Service (5:11-15)

1. Since they know the "fear of the Lord," not meaning terror but the reverential awe generated by the magnificence of the One (see Rev. 1:17) before whom they will stand (v. 10), Paul and his companions strive to "persuade men."

a. They do not, however, persuade in the negative sense of winning favor through deception or compromise (see Gal. 1:10), but in a way consistent with the seriousness of the judgment in v. 10.

b. They persuade with full knowledge that their motives and methods are fully exposed before God and in the hope that those motives and methods are also clear to the Corinthians' hearts.

2. Paul must have been criticized for commending himself because he denies that he is doing that when defending the straightforward character of his brand of persuasion.

a. Rather, he is giving them a basis to answer his critics. He wants his readers to feel justly proud of the way he and his companions conduct themselves.

b. He describes his critics as those who boast in appearance and not in heart. They have a shallow, external concept of spirituality. They prided themselves in such outward matters as their letters of recommendation (3:1), their forceful personality (10:10), their oratorical skills (11:6), their Jewish pedigree (11:22), and their visionary experiences (12:1-7).

3. Their emphasis on their visionary experiences is probably foremost in Paul's mind because:

a. In v. 13 he says that *his* ecstatic visionary experiences (being "not in his right mind" because of a vision or trance - Acts 10:10, 11:5, 22:17) are for God. In other words, they were moments of intimacy between himself and God, not something to be paraded to impress people.

b. On the other hand, his *rational* interaction with the Corinthians (being in his right mind) is for their spiritual benefit, something Paul is probably suggesting is a more relevant test in the evaluation of apostolic ministry.

c. This somewhat parallels Paul's comments about tongues in 1 Cor. 14, where the emphasis is on edification. In 14:28 Paul says that if no one is available to interpret the foreign language in which the worshipper miraculously speaks, the tongue-speaker must remain silent in the assembly. In that case, he must speak to God for his own benefit, meaning he must exercise his gift in private.

d. Many in the Charismatic movement have fallen prey to this kind of external evaluation of spirituality, this emphasis on the showy.

4. In v. 14 Paul explains that his commitment to spiritually bless the Corinthians (through rational interaction) is compelled by the fact of Christ's love, demonstrated in his death for all mankind.

a. And "therefore all died" in the sense that Christ's death was sufficient to serve as the death penalty for all. The penalty for all human sin has been paid, but it still must be individually appropriated through faith.

b. Verse 15 adds that Christ's atoning death for all mankind was intended to produce people who no longer live for themselves but for Christ (the one who died for them and was raised), which is precisely what Paul is doing.

c. Christian, whose interest are you pursuing in your life? Are you living for yourself or for the one who died for you?

#### J. Message of Reconciliation (5:16 - 6:2)

1. In light of the fact Christ died for mankind, Paul (and rightly all believers) no longer judge people from a worldly, external perspective. Indeed, we know how misleading such an assessment is in the case of Christ. Sure he was crucified like the lowest of criminals, but the reality is that he was the divine sacrifice for our sins.

2. So if anyone is a Christian, he or she is part of a completely new creation, part of the eternal heavenly age that will be finalized when Christ returns. As citizens of that new age, the lenses of the old age can no longer be made to fit us. Our perception of reality and of God's ways has been radically altered by the Christ event. Things which once were regarded as important are now seen as being worthless (e.g., Phil 3:4-8).

3. This is all from God. In all the action of the gospel the initiative is his; the new order, like the old, is his creative work. God is the one who reconciled Paul and his companions (and all believers) to himself through Christ and gave them the ministry of reconciliation.

a. This ministry of reconciliation consists essentially in the proclamation of the message of God's saving work in Christ, "that God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not charging their trespasses to them." Jesus is God's way of peace, peace through the forgiveness of our sins.

b. Having made reconciliation possible through the sacrifice of his Son, God entrusted the message of that reconciliation, the gospel of Christ, to the apostles and their assistants, who in turn entrusted it to many others. Paul told Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:2, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." This is the church's message to the world.

4. Therefore, they serve as ambassadors on behalf of Christ, as though God were appealing through them. They are his spokesmen, his agents in spreading the aroma of life. In fulfillment of that calling, they implore *people* (most insert "you") on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. That is the essence of their appeal (as the Corinthians should well know).

5. The reconciliation which Paul urges on behalf of Christ is made available through Christ's atoning work, a topic he elaborates on in v. 21. God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be "sin" on our behalf, so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.

a. The sinless Son of God was made to bear the consequences of our sin in order that God might deem us righteous by refusing, because of Christ's death in our place, to take account of our sins.

b. In taking upon himself the burden of humanity's sins (cf. Isa. 53:4-6, 12), Christ bore the holy wrath of God. His relationship with the Father was (momentarily, but terribly beyond all human comprehension) severed, which sheds light on his anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane and his cry of dereliction from the cross ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

6. So working together with God, Paul and his companions also appeal to the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. In other words, they want them to remain faithful to the gospel they initially received (e.g., by quitting the fight against sin or embracing a different gospel).

7. He emphasizes the seriousness of this appeal by quoting from Isa. 49:8, which speaks of God's gracious deliverance from the bondage of captivity at the chosen time. Well, Christ is the deliverance *par excellence*, and the time of that deliverance has come; it's here. It is absolutely unthinkable that such grace should be received in vain!

#### K. A Blameless Ministry (6:3-10)

1. In 6:3 Paul says that he conducts his apostolic ministry in a way that is above reproach. He does not want to be an obstacle to people receiving the grace of God in their lives. If people have legitimate questions about the integrity of the messenger, they may use that as an excuse to reject the message. This is something every Christian needs to remember.

2. Rather, Paul and his companions, as servants of God, conduct themselves in a way that commends or accredits their ministry.

a. They exhibited great endurance which testifies to their commitment to the task. They are not in it just to get something. Their endurance through hardships shows them to be "true believers" in what they proclaim, not some kind of religious hustlers who only sing the song when it benefits them to do so.

(1) Paul then specifies the kinds of things they have endured in their commitment to the gospel. The nine circumstances he lists comprise three sets of three.

(2) Afflictions, distresses, and difficulties are general terms for hardships. Beatings, imprisonments, and riots are particular examples of hardships inflicted on them by others. Labors, sleepless nights, and times without food speak of hardships voluntarily undertaken.

b. They exhibited "purity" (both moral uprightness and sincerity of purpose), "knowledge" (both the plan of redemption and pastoral insight), "patience" (endurance of injury without anger or retaliation), "kindness" (generous and sympathetic disposition), "the Holy Spirit" (His power in their lives), "genuine love" (not feigned), "the word of truth" (the divinely revealed gospel), and "the power of God" (disclosed through their weakness, suffering, and dedication to serving others).

c. They waged their battle with weapons of righteousness in the right and the left. Whether attacking or defending, they never resorted to the unholy tactics of many.

d. They showed themselves to be servants of God in that they would not be intimidated when foes dishonored or held them in low regard, nor would they be distracted from faithfulness when friends honored or held them in high regard.

e. From a worldly point of view, they were seen one way, but these worldly judgments missed the deeper reality of their ministry. From a spiritual perspective, which is the right perspective, they were quite something else. Through this lens the quality and genuineness of their ministry was evident.

(1) deceivers vs. men of integrity

(2) nobodies vs. well known to God's people

(3) dying vs. living by resurrection power

(4) punished vs. escaping death to bless others

(5) grieving vs. always rejoicing in blessings

(6) poor vs. enriching many with salvation

(7) having nothing vs. possessing everything

worth having

#### L. An Appeal for Reconciliation of Heart (6:11 - 7:4)

##### 1. The appeal (6:11-13)

a. Paul and his companions have bared their souls to the Corinthians and had made room for them in their hearts.

b. The problem in their relationship was not that Paul and his companions had restricted their affection for the Corinthians but that the Corinthians had restricted theirs for Paul and his companions.

c. Paul tenderly urges them to reciprocate the affection which he and his companions have for them. A minister is able to be most effective when the congregation loves him. Antagonism breeds resistance to the minister's message; the people cease to be teachable.

## 2. Charge of ethical laxity countered (6:14 - 7:1)

a. The way this section fits in the letter has long been debated. I think the most likely explanation is that Paul's opponents at Corinth, the Judaizing intruders, were getting mileage from twisting Paul's view of the temporality of the Mosaic law into a charge that he was ethically lax (antinomian). So Paul interjects a counter to that charge into his appeal for reconciliation.

b. However the section fits in the letter, its meaning seems reasonably clear. Paul exhorts the Corinthians not to live like the world. Christians are not to be misyoked to unbelievers in that they are not to join them in their pagan practices, in their godless work. We must break all bonds of cooperation in these areas.

(1) A "yoke" was put on animals for carrying loads. Those yoked together are engaged in the same enterprise; they're pulling the same load. Deut. 22:10 forbid plowing with an ox and a donkey yoked together, so Paul's imagery suggests that Christians are a different "breed" than non-Christians and are not to share in their work.

(2) That Paul's concern is with ethical and religious separation rather than with separation per se is suggested by the fact the paragraph concludes (7:1) with a call to perfect holiness. This suggests an advancing in holiness through repeated self-consecration, a constant drive to live as God's people. Furthermore, Paul elsewhere forbid Christians from divorcing their non-Christian spouses (1 Cor. 7:12-15) and called Christian slaves to submit to their masters (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25), which included non-Christians (1 Tim. 6:1-2). That shows that cooperative relationships with non-Christians are not inherently defiling.

(3) There is no excuse for a Christian joining in pagan practices, be it idol worship (which may be in the forefront) or some other sinful conduct, because Christians and pagans are worlds apart. We are righteous, in the light, of Christ, believers in the truth, and the temple of God. They are lawless, in the dark, of Satan, rejectors of the truth, and devotees of idols. We are to be spiritually pure, holy, and devoted to God. Though in the world, we are not to be of the world.

## 3. Appeal for reconciliation concluded (7:2-4)

(a) Paul resumes his appeal to the Corinthians to receive him and his companions into their hearts. He asserts their integrity at three levels.

(1) They "wronged" no one - They had not mistreated any of those in Corinth. On the contrary, the wrong had been done to them.

(2) They "ruined" no one - Their doctrine and example was not responsible for anyone's moral ruin, and their organizing of the collection was not responsible for anyone's financial ruin.

(3) They "exploited" no one - They did not take advantage of anyone at Corinth.

(b) In v. 3 Paul explains that in saying this he is seeking to deny the insinuations of the intruders not to blame the Corinthians. The intruders are the ones stirring up the trouble. He assures the Corinthians that they occupy a permanent place in his love and concern.

(c) Despite all his frustration, Paul has great confidence in the Corinthians' basic allegiance to him, and he is proud of how they responded to his "severe letter." In the midst of affliction, he was filled with comfort and overflowing with joy. The reason is given in the following verses: Titus had arrived with the encouraging news of how they had responded to that letter.

#### IV. The Joyful Reunion with Titus - 7:5-16

##### A. Comfort in Macedonia (7:5-7)

1. Paul returns to the account of his travels that was broken off at 2:13 to include the lengthy discussion about his ministry. When Titus didn't show up in Troas, Paul went to Macedonia expecting to meet him there, but Titus was not there when Paul arrived.

2. When Paul arrived in Macedonia he faced great distress. He was embroiled in "fightings without," which may point to quarrelling that focused on Paul or to opposition or persecution that beset him in Macedonia (perhaps related to the "severe test of affliction" facing the Macedonian churches - see, 8:1-2). He also faced "fears within," which probably refers to his concern over Titus and his mission to the Corinthians.

3. God comforted the distressed apostle in the coming of Titus itself and even more in the news of Titus's reception at Corinth (the comfort the Corinthians had given to Titus).

a. Note how Paul thanks God for Titus's coming. God was responsible for Titus's returning to him.

b. The reception with which the Corinthians had comforted Titus, the report of which comforted Paul, involved their "longing" to see Paul and to be reconciled to him, their "mourning" over their disloyal behavior, and their "zeal" to defend Paul's cause and to follow his directions in disciplining the guilty party.

#### B. The Severe Letter and Its Effect (7:8-13a)

1. Recall that after Paul's emergency visit to Corinth, a visit during which at least one of his opponents had attacked him in deeply insulting ways, Paul returned to Ephesus and wrote what is called the "severe" or "tearful" letter. In this letter he apparently laid down the standards he expected in the churches and sought to determine if they would meet those standards. He demanded the punishment of the ringleader who had maligned and opposed him so maliciously. This letter was not preserved.

2. At one point Paul regretted having sent this letter, apparently because he was uncertain about the effect it would have. But in light of the fact, which he learned from Titus, that the initial grief caused by the letter had produced repentance, rather than rejection and hostility, he now had no regrets. In fact, he now rejoiced, not because they endured grief but because they were led to repentance.

3. Because they experienced this godly sorrow, which produced repentance, they suffered no harm as a result of the painful letter. If, on the other hand, they had reacted with anger or bitterness, the letter would have had a negative effect (i.e., caused them some kind of "loss," which is what Paul had been concerned about).

4. The difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow is that godly sorrow produces repentance, a commitment to change, whereas worldly sorrow stops at remorse.

a. Repentance is redemptive. It leads to salvation in that there is no salvation without it. Those who willfully refuse to submit to God have rejected him; they do not have a biblical, saving faith. They love their sin more than they love God. Salvation, of course, is unaccompanied by regrets.

b. Worldly sorrow produces spiritual death precisely because it stops short of repentance. There is conviction but no repentance.

5. Paul reminds his readers of the outworking of this godly sorrow in their case, the repentance which it produced:

a. earnestness - serious about rectifying the matter

b. eagerness to clear themselves - to do what was necessary to set the matter right

c. indignation - directed toward the perpetrator(s) who had attacked Paul and/or themselves

d. fear - of God or of Paul as God's apostle

e. longing - to be reunited with Paul physically and emotionally

f. zeal (concern - NIV) - for Paul and his gospel and things of God

g. punishment - of the offender for attacking God's apostle

6. In every way they showed themselves innocent in that they did all that Paul asked of them. They gave Paul his due as God's apostle.

7. Given their positive reaction to the "severe letter," Paul now realizes that the purpose God intended the letter to serve was not so much to have the offender corrected nor to rectify the wrong done to Paul but to let the Corinthians as a group see just how much they really did care for Paul. And because of that, Paul and his companions have been comforted.

#### C. The Relief of Titus (7:13b-16)

1. In addition to the comfort they received from the Corinthians' response to the "severe letter," they were thrilled by Titus's joy regarding the Corinthians. They had refreshed his spirit; they were a great emotional lift for this soldier of Christ.

2. And part of why they were so thrilled was that Paul had bragged to Titus about the Corinthians as a whole (despite their failure to defend him when he had been maligned). He would have been embarrassed had they not lived up to what Paul told Titus about them.

3. Titus's affection for the Corinthians was enhanced as he remembered their obedience to the demands of the "severe letter" and the fear and trembling with which they received him (i.e., they were extremely concerned that they would fail to meet their obligations toward Paul's envoy).

4. This gave Paul good reason for complete confidence in them and a secure base from which to propose completion of the collection, which he does in chaps. 8 and 9. (Note: This confidence seems shaken in chaps. 10-13 [esp. 11:3-4, 19-20], which suggests that something has happened between these sections.)