

## **The Church of the Servant King**

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### **Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians**

(SB\_2 Cor\_chp 7)

#### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **CHAPTER 7**

**<sup>2</sup> Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one.**

Paul continues to express his desire for the Corinthians to remove the barrier formed by a distrust of Paul and his fellow workers – a desire expressed so eloquently in 6:11-7:1.

<sup>11</sup> *Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. <sup>12</sup> You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. <sup>13</sup> Now in a like exchange--I speak as to children--open wide to us also. <sup>14</sup> Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? <sup>15</sup> Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,*

*"I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM;  
AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.*

<sup>17</sup> *"Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord.*

*"AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN;*

*And I will welcome you.*

<sup>18</sup> *"And I will be a father to you,*

*And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,"*

*Says the Lord Almighty.*

<sup>1</sup> *Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

Paul’s open heart toward the Corinthians stands in contrast to the “restrained” affections of the Corinthians towards Paul that resulted from the closed heart of the Corinthians. Paul did not want the Corinthians to misinterpret his desire for an open heart, a heart that was trusting of others, thus resulting in a compromising relationship with unbelievers (e.g. 1 Cor 10:1-22 where compromise of the believer’s testimony could have occurred through participation in ceremonies related to idols and false gods).

<sup>1</sup> *For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; <sup>2</sup> and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; <sup>3</sup> and all ate the same spiritual food; <sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. <sup>6</sup> Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. <sup>7</sup> Do **not be idolaters, as some of them were;** as it is written, **"THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY."** <sup>8</sup> **Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. <sup>9</sup> Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. <sup>10</sup> Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>***

*Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup> Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, my beloved, **flee from idolatry.** <sup>15</sup> I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. <sup>16</sup> Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. <sup>18</sup> Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? <sup>19</sup> What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup> No, but I say that **the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.** <sup>21</sup> **You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.** <sup>22</sup> Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?*

Paul did not teach that Christians should discontinue all association with unbelievers since that would be contrary to what is consistent with our Lord's behavior and with what Paul had previously taught (Matt 9:10-11 cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 7:12-16; 10:27). However, here in 2 Corinthians 6, Paul is instructing Christians to form no binding interpersonal relationships with non-Christians *that would be tantamount to a compromise of the Truth.*

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul is implying that the Corinthians had become defiled, perhaps by occasionally sharing meals at idol-shrines or by continuing to attend festivals or ceremonies in pagan temples (cf. 1 Cor. 8:10; 10:14-22), or even by maintaining their membership in some local pagan cult. This passage [2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1] is a specific call for separation from the temple cults of Corinth. As such, it is very consistent with Paul's teaching relating to the phase 2 spiritual walk of the believer in so many other passages.

Paul urges the Corinthians to "make room for us in your hearts" – an expression that can be interpreted – "drop your defense shields toward us and our message." This is a reference to the defense mechanisms that the Corinthians had deployed against Paul – defense mechanisms that arose from distrust – distrust created when situations giving rise to personal injury are combined with old-man thinking (e.g. I'll never trust anyone who claims to teach God's message). Of course, this type of thinking on the part of those who have been hurt by the political power agendas that are at play in the religious realm is very much in line with and a part of one prong of Satan's strategy – neutralization.

The resulting "old-man thinking" had given rise to old-man belief systems – the "defensive shields" – in the Corinthians so that they could not "open up" or "open wide" with their affections toward Paul.<sup>1</sup> But Paul argues with three major points against any defense mechanisms that the Corinthians might have toward Paul when Paul writes in verse 2 – "*Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one.*" Paul and his companions had done no wrong to anyone, had not led anyone astray and had not deceived anyone so as to take advantage of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Our passage is concerned with only one manifestation of a self-defense shield. There are many areas of life where we can erect self-defense shields as a result of old-man thinking, e.g. when we value ourselves based upon our "identity" in the world through such mechanisms as our title, our position, our social status, or any other way in which the world recognizes us and that acknowledgement is later challenged by others or circumstances such as loss of job, collapse of social infrastructures, collapse of economic infrastructure, etc. Self-defense shields can be erected in regards to interpersonal relationships in life. A man might decide that he will never trust a woman to any extent (or vice versa) and the divine institutions of marriage, family and ultimately the nation and freedom suffers as the effects ripple throughout society. Sometimes the effects are widespread and deep enough to result in institutional changes in the social and political realm, e.g. the relativism of the day that is encouraging the alignment of our political and social institutions with homosexuality.

Paul continues his words of encouragement and exhortation to the Corinthians in chapter 7 as we continue.

### THE REPENTANCE OF THE CORINTHIANS (7:3-11)

*Paul Reminds the Corinthians of the Circumstances (7:3-7)*

**<sup>3</sup> I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. <sup>4</sup> Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction. <sup>5</sup> For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. <sup>6</sup> But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; <sup>7</sup> and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.**

Paul expresses empathy with his readers when he writes in verse 3 “*I do not speak to condemn you...*” Paul knows the heart of man and how it is wounded and how it takes time for people to trust another individual – especially an individual in a position of authority such as Paul who is claiming apostolic credentials granted under different circumstances than all of the other Apostles.

Paul’s capacity for agape love is absolutely amazing and is expressed in verse 3 in the phrase “*...you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.*” This is not the first time Paul has mentioned this for he says “*...for I have said before...*” the same thing. Essentially, Paul is saying that either he or they would go to the grave before Paul’s affection for them ceased.

I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls If I love you more, am I to be loved less? (2 Cor 12:15)

For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment. (Php 1:8-9)

Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thess 2:8)

Paul expresses his confidence in the Corinthians in verse 4 that the Corinthians would respond to his exhortation in the manner that was aligned with his heart’s desires. This was in spite of the the “affliction” under which Paul and his companions had been enduring. Paul expresses similar sentiments toward his charges in Philippi.

But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. (Php 2:17)

Paul’s confidence is based upon his previous experience as he anticipated Titus’ report regarding how the Corinthians had received his “severe” letter (2 Cor 2:12-13). Paul recounts that time of anticipation and the circumstances surrounding his receipt of Titus’ report in verses 5-7. Paul returned to the subject of his meeting Titus in Macedonia (2 Cor 2:13), a topic from which he had deviated in order to develop a thought regarding the new covenant ministry to believers of the present dispensation (2 Cor 2:14—6:10) and to urge acceptance of his ministry (2 Cor 6:11—7:4).

<sup>12</sup> Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, <sup>13</sup> I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia. (2 Cor 2:12-13)

You may recall that when Paul arrived in Macedonia, he could not find Titus. According to Paul's own testimony in our passage, this created "fears within" and "depression." These internal struggles were occurring within the context of external "conflicts" and "afflictions" on every side. Paul's choice of words here to describe the circumstances surrounding the report of Titus is extremely interesting – "fears within" and "depression." These are words typically associated with sinful thoughts. Paul will later write to Timothy.

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. (2 Tim 1:7)

So, was Paul sinning as he awaited this report from Titus? I think the answer is "no." Here is why. There is a difference between "fear" and "depression" borne of a lack of faith and trust in the Lord and "fear" and "depression" that is related to a concern over the response of one's charges to the Truth. The former is borne of old-man thinking and belief systems superseding divine viewpoint thinking and new-man belief systems in the soul. The latter is borne of agape love for others in regard to whether they will identify with the Truth communicated and become aligned with God's plan for their lives so that the fullest extent of the blessings God has in store will be experienced.

Paul's contentment in all things as he trusted the Lord fully, even in the external and internal conflicts with which he battled, was multiplied upon his receipt of Titus' report. Three things turned his spirits around: the arrival of Titus after some delay, Titus' report of his positive experience at Corinth, and the Corinthians' positive attitude toward Paul. The Christians felt affection for Paul and wanted to see him again, and they were very sorry that they had been disloyal to him. Moreover they strongly supported Paul against his critics and sought to obey him. The more Titus told Paul, the more the apostle's spirits revived.

#### Application

Have you ever had this type of concern for other believers? If not, perhaps you've never really engaged in any type of personal ministry OR if you have, perhaps it was solely based upon the energy of the flesh – human good, thus motivated not by identification and alignment with the plan of God, but programs and plans designed by men.

Do you have defense mechanisms in your soul that are keeping you from acknowledging and responding correctly to men in positions of Christian leadership – in the local church, in other ministry or at home? If so, are you taking it before the Lord to cleanse you of it?

Is there any area of your life where your identity is still derived from the world? Or, is your attitude one of "there is nothing the world has that I need." "My sufficiency is in Christ."

*Paul's Commentary on the Corinthian's Repentance (7:8-11)*

**<sup>8</sup> For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it-- for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—<sup>9</sup> I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. <sup>10</sup> For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow**

**of the world produces death.<sup>11</sup> For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.**

In verses 8-9, Paul admits that he had regretted sending the severe letter after he had done so. He had thought that it was too harsh. Fortunately, his readers responded to it as he had hoped they would, though it had caused them some pain at first. Fortunately, it had not led the church into excessive discouragement, but genuine repentance. The Christians had changed their thinking and their behavior.

As Paul will write in a few verses, evidently the church had decided to defend Paul against a vocal critic of his (v. 12). The church's failure to take this stand would have resulted in loss at the judgment seat of Christ and loss of the blessings in time available to us as believers in Christ. Therefore, ultimately, Paul did not regret sending the severe letter.

Paul highlights two possible responses to constructive criticism by believers along with the consequences of each response. The proper response which is in accordance with God's will results in a change of mind (repentance) that leads to deliverance (temporal salvation) and no regret (i.e. a clear conscience). The improper response and the response typical in the world is one borne of arrogance and does not result in a change of mind. Instead, the result is resentment and bitterness – certainly at odds with the experience of eternal “life” in time and tantamount to “death” in time.

Adversity, pressure and suffering alone does not benefit us apart from engendering the desired transformation in us. It proves to be a good thing for us only as we respond properly to it (cf. James 1:2-4).

<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>4</sup> And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas 1:2-4)

Paul identified several good things that had come to his Corinthian readers because they had responded properly to his recent rebuke. Their response had yielded earnestness (seriousness of purpose), the desire to prove themselves worthy, and righteous indignation at the affront to Paul. It had further resulted in concern over their behavior and its effects, a longing to see Paul again, a determination to make things right, and a correction of their error.

*Paul Offers Additional Elaboration and Explanation (2 Cor 7:12-15)*

**<sup>12</sup> So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. <sup>13</sup> For this reason we have been comforted. And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. <sup>14</sup> For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth. <sup>15</sup> His affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. <sup>16</sup> I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.**

Like any good, objective leader, Paul had to keep the greater mission and purpose at the forefront of his actions and motivation – the objective whole resulting in subjective benefit for the constituent parts, the individual believers. Paul loved each of the individuals of the church at Corinth; however, as a leader, Paul had to also not compromise the corporate purpose of the local church. This balance is at play in what Paul writes in verse 12 and Paul's hope when he wrote the severe letter was

that greater cohesion amongst these believers would result as the reality of their loyalty to him was realized. That loyalty to Paul and his message would strengthen them against future tests.

"Many opinions have been expressed as to the identity of the wrongdoer and the nature of his act of injustice toward Paul. Most likely, in our view, is the suggestion that this event should be linked with a public disturbance during the second visit (12:20) when Paul confronted those who had not relinquished their former sexual practices (12:21—13:2), connected as these probably were with ongoing temple attendance (6:14—7:1). The most consistent reconstruction of Paul's scattered remarks on the subject throughout 2 Corinthians is that this man publicly opposed, and to some degree thwarted, Paul's attempt at discipline during that fateful visit."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>12:20</sup> For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; <sup>21</sup> I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced. <sup>13:1</sup> This is the third time I am coming to you EVERY FACT IS TO BE CONFIRMED BY THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES. <sup>2</sup> I have previously said when present the second time, and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone. (2 Cor 12:20-13:2)

Paul's words of praise for his readers before he had sent Titus to them had proved worthy in view of their response to Paul's messenger and his message. Paul also rejoiced that his confidence in them had been confirmed and verse 16 becomes the pivot verse around which the whole of the epistle swings. Paul will proceed to appeal to them again in chapters 8 thru 9.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 380-81.