

2Cor. 7:1 ¶ Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

“dearly beloved” - I think it is significant to note again that Paul is writing to people he cares about and wants to encourage in spiritual growth.

What promises? The promise that declares the believer a new creation in Christ clothed in the very righteousness of Jesus and positions him as a son and daughter of God the Father. Though the Father sees us as righteous through the blood of His Son, we still have to deal with sin in this body of flesh and blood. It takes work and commitment to “cleanse” self from the filthiness of the flesh and spirit. The Greek for *filthiness* is a direct reference to immorality. It is important to note that this immorality is reflected in both flesh (physical activity) and spirit (thought activity). This is the point that Jesus was making in the Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:27-28 “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

Until we receive our glorified bodies, the flesh will continue to struggle with the spirit of the child of God. Paul was very clear about this struggle in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians.

Romans 7:18-19 “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.”

Galatians 5:16-17 “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

“perfecting holiness” – This is a reference to the process of sanctification or becoming more like Jesus as we grow spiritually. What is the key to sanctification? Becoming immersed in the word of God.

John 17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

Ephesians 5:25-27 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; **That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word**, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

Immersing oneself in the word of God is key to fighting spiritual immorality. Many Christians find it easier to discipline the flesh for fear of what others may think. The sins of the spirit, however, are not always so easy to conquer. Personally, I continually struggle with a spirit of pride and selfishness. The more time I spend in the word and in fellowship with the Lord in prayer, the less opportunity I give the enemy to attack me through those weaknesses.

What is our motivation for working to become more holy? The fear of God. We tend to try to soften the impact of this phrase by relating it to reverence and awe and ignoring the truth that God is to be feared with alarm and fright (from the Greek) due to His amazing power and authority. I think it is important to understand that reverence and awe spring from an understanding of the power and authority of God. Jesus referenced this truth as well when talking to His disciples about having a bold witness.

Matthew 10:28 "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Fear of the Lord produces obedience to His word.

Deuteronomy 13:4 "Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him."

Fear of the Lord results in deliverance from your enemies.

2 Kings 17:39 "But the LORD your God ye shall fear; and he shall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies."

Psalms 34:7 "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

Fear of the Lord will always benefit us.

Psalms 34:9 "O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him."

Ecclesiastes 8:12 "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him:"

Fear of God eliminates pride in one's life.

Ephesians 5:21 "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God."

When we fear God, it pleases Him.

Psalms 147:11 "The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."

When we fear God, we will hate evil.

Proverbs 8:13 "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate."

Fear of the Lord produces wisdom.

Psalms 111:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever."

Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

Fear of the Lord empowers us to have a bold witness and have no fear of man.

Psalms 118:4-6 "Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever. I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"

2Cor. 7:2 Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.

Paul's desire is to enjoy unity of spirit and fellowship with this body of believers. He is reminding them that neither he nor any of his coworkers have wronged or taken advantage of anyone through their ministry. I believe that there are many in the ministry today would have trouble making this claim.

2Cor. 7:3 I speak not *this* to condemn *you*: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with *you*.

In this verse Paul is making it clear that his love for the Corinthian believers is not dependent upon their returning that love. His love for them will endure in life and/or death.

2Cor. 7:4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.

Paul is basically saying that in spite of the trouble they have experienced in their relationship, his heart is encouraged by their testimony to the world.

2Cor. 7:5 ¶ For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without *were* fightings, within *were* fears.

Paul relates that when they first came to Macedonia, they were confronted with tremendous trouble that produced fear for their safety. The following verses reference how the good report from Titus about Corinth brought them comfort, so maybe the fears from within were regarding their concerns for the believers at Corinth.

2Cor. 7:6 Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

2Cor. 7:7 And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.

This verse has two important truths for the believer—1) God is our source of comfort, and 2) Sometimes that comfort is provided in the person of another believer.

The Greek for the word *comfort* gives the root of Webster's definition. It doesn't just mean to provide cheer and solace; it includes the idea of imparting strength through encouragement. That made a lot of sense to me in light of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the child of God. God personally comforts us through His Spirit and His Word. Often, He also provides us with the additional tangible, physical ministry in word and deed of another person.

Paul is admitting that he and his team had been "cast down," or a bit depressed, regarding how his letter might affect the status of their relationship with the Corinthian believers. Titus had evidently been commissioned to go and deliver Paul's letter and report on the response of the Corinthians. The return of Titus with a good report was of great comfort to Paul and his team. Titus reported that the Corinthians had personally encouraged him and assured him of their

fervent love for Paul. This report not only comforted Paul, it brought him great joy.

2Cor. 7:8 For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though *it were* but for a season.

2Cor. 7:9 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

Paul's letter was fairly stern and pointed; and although written from a heart of love and concern, he wasn't sure they would recognize that truth. That's always the concern when expressing oneself through the written word. I can't tell you how many times I have agonized over letters that I have written to family members out of spiritual concern taking great care with the choice of words and scripture and covering them in prayer. Still, my heart was burdened with how they would receive those letters and whether they would hear the heart behind them.

Paul was blessed to get a report of the response to his letter. Though he questioned whether he had done the right thing once the letter was on the way, he could now see that the result was according to his intention. Though his letter had undoubtedly caused sorrow, he could rejoice that it was sorrow that produced the fruit of repentance. It had resulted to their benefit and not their hurt. Repentance is a reference to a change in heart and/or action when confronted with one's sin.

2Cor. 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

Paul knew that had the response of the Corinthians been one of hurt and anger instead of godly sorrow that results in repentance, it could have resulted in a permanent rift in fellowship. This, in turn, would have had a negative impact on any future ministry in Corinth.

David Guzik used a quote attributed to John Trapp that I liked: "In sin, the pleasure passeth, the sorrow remaineth; but in repentance, the sorrow passeth, the pleasure abideth for ever. God soon poureth the oil of gladness into broken hearts."

"repentance to salvation" – I think the reference to salvation here is a reference to deliverance or rescue from further consequences associated with their sin—not a reference to their spiritual rebirth.

2Cor. 7:11 For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, *what* clearing of yourselves, yea, *what* indignation, yea, *what* fear, yea, *what* vehement desire, yea, *what* zeal, yea, *what* revenge! In all *things* ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

I like the wording of the NLT for this verse: "*Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation,*

such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish the wrongdoer. You showed that you have done everything you could to make things right."

I believe it is only through the ministry of the Spirit in one's life that one can jump the hurdle of pride and in humility acknowledge sin that is identified by someone else without blameshifting and with a true desire to make things right.

2Cor. 7:12 ¶ Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you.

Paul is clear in identifying that his motive for writing so pointedly was because of his love and concern for the body of believers before God. He was much more concerned for the possible impact on the whole body of believers and not just the wrongdoer and his victim.

Ray Stedman expressed his understanding a bit differently, and it seemed to fit in more readily with the other translations: "He [Paul] is implying: 'The reason you got into this condition where you let this kind of a matter go unjudged in your midst was because you forgot who you were. You forgot that you are sons of God, children of light, that you have understanding of life that others do not have; and that you have power to act that others do not possess.' I wrote to you to show you who you are, that in your heart, basically, is an obedience of commitment to the Lord himself, because I knew that when you saw that again your whole behavior would change."

2Cor. 7:13 Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all.

Paul reiterates again how the report from Titus gave them cause for rejoicing—not only because of the response of the Corinthians to Paul's letter, but also to their ministry of encouragement to Titus. Instead of returning from a difficult errand tired and with a heavy heart, Titus was refreshed and ready to serve.

It really is amazing how our attitude impacts our energy and effectiveness in ministry. There are many times that the Lord has graciously given me an unexpected lift in spirit and renewed energy to keep on keeping on through an unexpected word of encouragement or appreciation from someone. It is always especially sweet when it comes from family—whether in blood or spirit.

2Cor. 7:14 For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth.

Paul is basically saying that just as he has spoken truth in all his teaching to the Corinthians, so too had his words to Titus of his confidence in a right response from the believers at Corinth proven true.

At this point, you would never know that Paul had ever had the doubts he expressed in verse 8. I really am thankful that the Lord is faithful to reveal the spiritual struggles of great men and women of faith in scripture. They provide

such great encouragement and hope when we are confronted with similar spiritual struggles.

2Cor. 7:15 And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him.

I liked the CJB translation for this verse: *“And his affection for you is all the greater as he remembers how ready you were to obey and how you received him with reverence and respect.”*

It is so very true that one’s love for others grows naturally in direct response to the love and respect one is shown by others. It’s easy to love someone who is kind and loving to you; it is much harder to continue to love those who are unlovable. That is one of the most amazing things about God’s love for us—the fact that He was willing to give His very best and most precious though He knew that gift would be spurned by so many.

2Cor. 7:16 I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.

At this point Paul has complete confidence in the spiritual health of the church at Corinth.