

2 Corinthians 7 pt 1 v.2-7

RECAP - BE holy, be separate, you are God's saints, and if you are God's saints, filled with the Holy Spirit then the evidence will be how you live.

In its most extreme we know this to be the case and we glorify God for it -

[1Co 6:8-11 NKJV] 8 No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and [you do] these things [to your] brethren! 9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

In the middle ground - this truth is still applicable. Christ takes us "okay" people and makes us holy - therefore we live a sanctified life, separated unto God for His purpose.

In that process, a bunch of sinners come together and become a part of this thing we call church, the Body and Bride of Christ - which is so meaningful and necessary.

Since a bunch of us sinners come together we can sometimes grate against one another, that is what happens when we do life together.

The danger is to clam up, wall off, walk away, to quit, to draw back.

[Heb 10:38-39 NKJV] 38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if [anyone] draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him." 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul..

This is a tremendous temptation when we are feeling particularly convicted or challenged.

This appears to be the case with Paul and the Corinthians, whom - while he had labored so abundantly for them - had a rocky and contentious relationship.

Nevertheless, it did not lead to abandonment or a loss of faith, but further refinement, softening, growing, and a deeper more meaningful understanding of grace, patience, kindness, and discernment.

For the Corinthians this all lead to a deeper understanding of what it means to be a part of the church - as instructed by their dear Apostle.

The same holds true for us - in an era where church hopping is the norm, Jesus has something to teach us about His person and His people as we do church together.

Jesus' intentions are not primarily concerned with making us comfortable in every church gathering. His primary concern is making us holy.

V.2-3 Addresses this issue of being closed off.

The Corinthian church was extending to Paul the cold shoulder rather than the right hand of fellowship.

Paul desired to have openness and meaningful fellowship with this church that he had labored so abundantly for.

A portion of that church, however, having been poisoned by an attitude of criticality had turned against the apostle.

So Paul was compelled to answer these criticisms that were really born out of contempt for Paul and his ministry.

We find that this kind of attitude did nothing to build the Body up and only served to sow discord and division with the church.

Apparently Paul had been accused of corruption, taking advantage of people, and offending people.

Paul will defend his ministry further in future chapters but it's really a shame that he was put in this position in the first place.

Words have meanings, people are malleable and people love gossip so at the first hint of an accusation people are quite willing to participate in

defaming another if it improves their own position or their own power. That appears to be the case in Corinth.

What made this more challenging for Paul was that he didn't stay in one place for very long, so when he left people jumped in to try to fill that leadership void and they would use underhanded means to boost their own credibility.

Paul was aware that this happened. He shared very clear instruction on this risk with the Ephesian church elders:

[Act 20:29-31 NKJV] 29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Having been treated that way by the Corinthians. How do you repair a relationship like that?

First, Paul didn't hold grudges. "I do not say this to condemn." He is the Apostle of Grace! He knew his own heart, struggles, failures...keeping that in mind helps us be more gracious to others.

Second, he had a soft spot in his heart for God's churches. He lived and died with the Saints. His heart was that deeply intertwined with their own well-being and hardship

Do we? Paul famously wrote that love keeps no record of wrongs (1 COR 13:5 NIV). Do we?

V.4 - Now, this doesn't mean that Paul let the wolves run roughshod over the church. He was not timid in correction. But in correction he left room for the Holy Spirit to work, to bring conviction and to bring repentance.

Paul demonstrated a great boldness of speech toward the Corinthians. Often lacking, why?

We fear the disapproval of people. We fear that if we teach God's word boldly that people will take offense and leave. We sometimes feel like we have to finesse the truth to bring somebody to repentance.

When it's never our responsibility at all as the messenger to bring repentance. It is the Holy Spirit's job AND ultimately that soul under conviction is accountable for their response.

Along with great boldness came great boasting on their behalf - often lacking. Why?

We don't want people to become arrogant or "puffed up." We say things like, "don't let this go to your head."

The Bible never teaches us to humble each other. The Bible teaches us to humble ourselves AND we have the Biblical example, laid down by the Apostles to BOAST in the church and in the Saints and thereby glorify God for using His people for His glory.

We can't be held responsible for somebody else's pride. Only our own.

*Incidentally there is a warning for the novice to beware and to not be put into any position of leadership lest they be overcome by their own pride. There is a warning.

The settling. Paul had a settled heart. Not all of the time, but at least as he writes these words to them.

He was filled with comfort and joy regardless of the conflict that he and the church faced.

This is a great mark of maturity, to be able to say the hard things without losing our cool.

You ever done that? Had to have a hard talk, maybe at work, or family, maybe even church?

What happens? Our hearts beat 1000 beats a minute, we forget what we were going to say, we stutter, we get flustered, we get defensive, maybe passive aggressive, maybe aggressive aggressive?

BUT, if what we are saying is Biblical, and lead by the Holy Spirit, and thereby it is true - then we can have great comfort and exceeding joy in all of our tribulation.

NOW - warning....lean not on your own understanding. The trap is to paint our own understanding, tactics, and wisdom as God-breathed when we have to use great boldness of speech.

That is the time for examination.

Can we say, like Paul, we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one?

Or, are we secretly the wolves among the sheep seeking to assert our own interests at the expense of others?

Let us not forget that Paul's tribulations were not completely internal either but he faced great challenges during his travels to bring the gospel to unbelievers. Even in this he was steadfast.

V.5 Travelling to Macedonia (The Philippian, Thessalonian, and Berean churches)

From where this letter is written (Philippi)

We find a person who, even as pens these words about being filled with comfort and joy we would say that he was “whipped.”

He and his companions were physically tired. When we are tired we desire rest.

Let me ask you, how does this measure with Jesus words, “my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”? Is Paul to be rebuked because he was tired?

Sometimes we may extrapolate Jesus’ words to mean that our internal peace, comfort, the Joy that Christ gives us will change our external circumstances so that we will not be troubled, afflicted, or hard-pressed.

That’s not what the Bible teaches.

Jesus taught, in this world you will have tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

The notion that Christ’s “yoke is easy and His burden is light” means that regardless of our external circumstances; regardless of being pressing on all sides; regardless of the affliction -- our internal, everlasting ease with Christ, that peace, that comfort, that joy -- that, remains immovable.

Paul was afflicted, and He continued.

He fought physically. Not just those things of the mind, heart and spirit but externally there were conflicts - quarrels. I wonder if they fought with each other? We know that Paul could be argumentative as he was with Barnabas and Peter.

Inside, those unseen things, he was afraid.

We know that God has not given us a Spirit of Fear (2 Tim 1:7)...and we love quoting that verse as a form of comfort and exhortation to one another. But in our weakness we do fear. We fear uncertainty, hardship, physical discomfort, death. We fear many things.

May God be magnified in our weakness as we are prone to fear. He proves himself strong in our fearful moments.

As Paul and his companions move on to Macedonia, we would say things were pretty bad. We wouldn't say that they were having a great time.

They were fearful, tired, beat up, fighting with others and maybe even one another. Yet, they remained steadfast. AND THEN...

V.6-7 God knows just what we need, when we need it. Sometimes God lets us grow a bit in the suffering - like putting more weight on the bar.

In the trying moments we come face to face with our own weakness, our own pride, our own deficiencies.

We also see the deficiencies of others that we really love and respect...and that can certainly be challenging - then we are forced to be gracious!

But then, God who comforts the downcast - an apt description of Paul and his ministry team - sent Titus.

Sometimes God comforts us by other Christians! Can people say that about us?

Hearing of the Corinthians' affairs encouraged Paul who surely wondered what was going on!?

Titus was comforted by the Corinthians - what a good sign! Knowing their shortcomings, things could have gone worse. That enlarged Paul's heart.

Titus' experience with them confirmed their enduring standing as a church of God, the saints! Sure they were rough around the edges, but their care for him, love for him, proved their heart. Their care and zeal for Paul also. They were sad, that they made Paul sad...and that was a good sign.

Next week - sorrow and repentance.

Takeaways -

*Be open, you're part of God's church and while we are imperfect, God shapes us through the challenge.

*Be real - you're going to face conflict and fear.

*Be a Titus - encourage, support, tell of God's good work.