

2 Corinthians 7

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[0 : 00] Gracious Son, beloved Lord, we bow before thee this night, and we pray thee to be amongst us, giving us of thy strength and grace and thy mercy.

For we have no help but thee. We need thee every hour, and we pray thee, Lord, to be with us now in this hour, to give us of thy strength, to give us thy blessing.

We pray that thou would give us also a spirit of prayer, that as we open our hearts to thee, thou, Lord, would fill those hearts with thy spirit and with thy word.

As we read it, as we sing it, as we think upon it, we pray thee, Lord, to help us. We ask thee to go before us in this time of worship together, to take away all thy restructuring thoughts and all that may come between us and thee, that we may entrust our souls to thee, and that we would know that thou art with us now, and that thou, Lord, hast promised to be with us, and shalt be with thy people, for us whoever they work upon thee.

So continue with us, now we pray. Forgive our many sins, and grant us thy great grace. For Jesus' sake. Amen. We sing to the Lord's praise, first of all, in Gaelic, in Psalm 27.

[1 : 14] Psalm 27 of what we've been saying, the verses Mark 1 and 2, that is the first two stanzas. Now as we continue in our progress through this section of 2 Corinthians, we read at the beginning of chapter 7, Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved. Well, what are the promises?

The promises are what we find at the end of chapter 6, remembering as well, as we have often said in the past, in the original, there's not chapters in verses, there's only the continuous narrative going on.

So we have that God has said, I, verse 16 of chapter 6, I will dwell in them and walk in them. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Verse 18, I will be a father unto you, ye shall be my sons and daughters.

Touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, saith the Lord Almighty. So, having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness.

This is the promise that God makes if we come out from among these sinful things that we refer to in chapter 6, that is, treating other gods as though they were this equal of the true God, being unequally yoked with unbelievers, whether in worship, in business, or in deed, as we looked last time, in marriage and so on.

[2 : 39] Come out from among them, be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. We have these promises that God has promised to bless if we seek to make a clear distinction between that which is the Lord's and that which is not.

Let us cleanse ourselves, then, from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the feet of the Lord, feet of God. Now, notice it says flesh and spirit.

It's not simply talking about, you know, fornication and lasciviousness and so on, but it's putting flesh and spirit together in the same breath. And in the previous chapter, we saw that we were looking also not merely about the flesh and about marriage and so on, but about idolatry, about worship that equated the worship of God with the worship of idols.

We might think, well, that's two completely separate things. That's spiritual stuff and fleshly stuff. These are completely different, but actually they're not, because the one feeds inevitably into the other.

If we worship that which is impure and unclean, it will manifest itself in an unclean life. And likewise, if we have an unclean life, that will likewise feed into what we believe.

[3 : 53] What you'll find, for example, and has been tragically the case in some branches of the church, is that those who may have been of sound and orthodox faith, after a particular episode in their lives where uncleanness comes in, and whoever there is is shame or disgrace, then suddenly they no longer preach or proclaim or believe the same strictness, the same faithfulness of God's word as once they did, because their lives no longer reflect it.

The flesh feeds into the spirit and the spirit into the flesh. If we are clean in the one, it enables us or helps us to be clean in the other. This is one reason why he says, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the feet of God.

The two are interconnected. They are not completely separate pigeonholes. They do affect each other. And we find this in the church, we find it in doctrine, and we find it in life.

If you believe something that's dodgy, it will likewise be manifested in your life. And likewise, if your life is compromised, that will affect what you believe. And whether or not you take bits of the word of God seriously or just say, oh, well, nobody does that nowadays.

You just have to accept the fact times have changed. And we compromise on the word of God if we have compromised in our personal lives. So the flesh and the spirit are connected in that sense.

[5 : 20] Perfecting holiness in the feet of God. What does that mean? It doesn't mean being sinless. It means going on to completion. Perfecting holiness means building on what you have started.

For example, when Galatians chapter 3, verse 3 says, Are you so foolish? Having begun in the spirit, are you now made perfect in the flesh? You know, have you now completed in the flesh, going backwards?

When you started in the spirit, chapter 5, verse 7 of Galatians, You did run well. Who did hinder you that you should not obey the truth? You started well. Starting well is good.

But then you've fallen away. You've gone backwards. So we have to be perfecting holiness, building on it in the fear of God, making sure that both flesh and spirit are likewise dedicated to the Lord.

Receive us. He says, we have wronged no man. We have corrupted no man. We have defrauded no man. Now he's contrasting himself here with the so-called false apostles, who came in amongst the different branches of the church in those days, and sought to make gain of them.

[6 : 27] Sought to become sort of celebrities, who would be, you know, who would then be sort of provided for, who would be paid or given retainer fees or whatever, and to basically milk the churches for what they could get, and then move on to the next one.

So they would claim great authority. They would claim that they were calling people back to a much better way, you know, different from the simplicity of the gospel that Paul was preaching.

He says, we have corrupted no man. We have wronged no man. We have defrauded no man. He's contrasting himself with those false apostles. He doesn't go on to say, look, we have helped you positively in this, that, and the next way.

He leaves that to their own judgment. All he is clearing himself of at this stage is having actually wronged them at all. We have wronged no man. We have corrupted no man. We have defrauded no man.

I speak not this to condemn you. For I have said before, you're in our hearts to die and live with you. He doesn't want to pick a fight with the Corinthians. He wants them to know how much he loves them, how much they are in his heart.

[7 : 33] Great is my boldness of speech toward you. Great is my glorying of you. I am filled with comfort and strength. I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.

And I will see here, and also towards the end of the chapter, that clearly the situation in Corinth, the progress of the Corinthian church, had been something that he had been happy to tell others about, how well Corinth was doing.

As he says to Titus, you know, my boasting will not cause me to be ashamed. Verse 14. I have confidence in you in all things. I am exceeding joyful, verse 4 then, in all our tribulation.

For when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Without were fightings, within were fierce. This is almost picking up, if you want to turn back a few pages, to what we find in chapter 2, verse 12.

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and the door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother.

[8 : 34] But taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia. It says, when we were coming to Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, and we were troubled on every side. Without were fightings, within were fierce.

Nevertheless, God that comforted those that are cast out, comforted us by the coming of Titus. Initially at Troas, he couldn't find Titus, went into Macedonia. And so where Philippi, and other cities are, and Titus arrived, and passed on good news to him.

Good news that the Corinthians, had listened to Paul's first letter, particularly the stinging rebuke, that you find in chapter 5, with the individual, who was having a relationship, with his stepmother.

And they have listened to him, and they've acted on it. 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.

So they have shown obedience, which is a great, a huge encouragement to Paul, because at a distance, he has no way of enforcing that obedience, but they have responded positively toward that first letter.

[9 : 47] For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent. Now I want you to notice, in the next few verses, verses 8 to 10 for example, the word repent, or repentance, is used two or three different times.

But it's not always the same word, in the original Greek, that is being used. And it means slightly different things. Where we've got, I do not repent, though I did repent, this is what you might call, B-type repentance.

And this is an expression of regret, or a change of mind. It's sorrowing, but not repentance in the sense of, you know, repenting of a sin, and so on.

So though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent. You know, I'm not sorry that I sent you that letter. Though I did repent, I was sorry, for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.

Now I rejoice not that you were made sorry, but that you sorrowed to repentance. Now this is what we might call A-type, as opposed to B-type. The B-type is the lesser, sort of sorrowing, change of mind, change of thought.

[10 : 56] A-type repentance, we might say, as we have it here, although it's the same word translated in the English, a different Greek word, that means a complete turning around, a complete change of direction, not simply change of mind, but a change of direction.

This is classical repentance. The Greek term is metanoia, complete turning around. For you were made sorry after a godly manner, that you might receive damage by us in nothing, so that we don't have to come down hard on you, so that we don't have to have a roof between us and you.

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation. Again, A-type repentance, this turning around, complete change of direction, repentance to salvation, not to be repented of, B-type, not to make you sorry, not to make you want to change your mind.

So, although you've got the word repent in here, lots of different times, it's not always the same term. So, just go over it again briefly. Though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, B-type.

You know, change your mind, change your heart. Though I did repent, B-type. I perceive the same epistle I've made you sorry, though it were but for a season. I rejoice not that you are made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance, A-type, complete turning around, complete change of direction.

[12 : 17] They repented, and they ought to repent, because remember, 1 Corinthians 5, as a church, you were going along quite happily while somebody was having an affair with his stepmother, with his father's wife.

Not his biological mother, but his father's wife. And they were all quite happy with us. They were quite happy to just let us go. You were made sorry after a godly manner that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

Godly sorrow, work of repentance to salvation. If we're going to have salvation, if we're going to be redeemed, there has to be a complete change of direction in our lives. You might think, well, maybe I don't need a complete change of direction.

Maybe I'm doing okay, I'm doing my best, I'm a reasonably good person. But we are all born and conceived in sin. And all the worst excesses, such as you find in 1 Corinthians 5 there, or other illustrations or examples of it, are simply symptoms of the fact that we are born and conceived in sin.

If we are going to be saved, then we need repentance to salvation. That has to be a complete change of direction. We have to recognize that our lives, as they stand, are going in one direction, and that is hellwards.

[13 : 29] Unless we be redeemed, unless we be saved, and if we're going to be saved, there has to be a complete change of direction. We don't have the power to bring that about.

Only Christ has the power to bring that about. For by grace are you saved through faith, not none of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Repentance to salvation, not to be repented of.

In other words, it doesn't make you sorry, that repentance. Nobody who is actually saved ever regrets that they are actually saved. They don't say, oh, well, I'm going to have it now.

Yes, I've got this relationship with Christ, but oh, I really wish I was back in the world. Oh, I really wish I was just carrying on my old life. It was so much better. It was so much more fun. It was so much more fulfilling.

No, it wasn't. There is no truly born again Christian who genuinely wishes they were back in the world. It is a salvation not to be repented of. It doesn't make you sorry.

[14 : 25] It doesn't make you wish you had gone back into the world. But the sorrow of the world worketh death. Think, for example, of Judas Iscariot.

There's no doubt that he was sorry for his betrayal of Christ. And in the authorised version, of course, it does say that he repented himself. But again, the Greek word used in the original there is not the type A repentance we might talk about, the complete change of direction, the complete turnaround.

It is, in a sense, remorse. It is sorrow, perhaps, that it hadn't gone the way that he had hoped or he hadn't had the outcome that he hoped. He is sorry the way things have turned out.

But there's not this repentance. There's not the complete change of direction. And because it is the sorrow of the world, it worketh death. For behold, this selfsame thing, that ye, that is the Corinthians now, sorrowed after a godly sort, this isn't the kind of sorrow that worked to death.

What did it work against instead? What carefulness it wrought in you, having care for themselves and the reputation of the church. Yea, what clearing of yourselves.

[15 : 37] They had been guilty of turning a blind eye, but they put that right. Yea, what indignation against their own sinfulness. Yea, what fear, fear of transgressing against the Lord.

Yea, what vehement desire to do right, to set themselves on the right path. Again, yea, what zeal for the gospel, the glory of God. Yea, what revenge against sin and against their own feelings.

In all things, you have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter. Because, in one sense, the fact that they had turned from a serious sin in which they were all kind of implicated in so far as they were quite happy to let it carry on going on, the fact they had turned from this and they had repented, they had completely changed direction, is more of an encouragement to Paul than if, say, they'd been trundling along quite happily and there wasn't any blemish to be concerned with in Corinth at all.

It's partly the sense in which, you know, Jesus says, you know, there's more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over 99 just persons that don't actually need any repentance.

If you've got a church where nothing is wrong, no, nothing at fault, who's to say how they would respond under pressure? And the refuges you've got here in Corinth, you've got what was a moral crisis and Paul has drawn attention to that moral crisis, he has rebuked them, he has told them what they need to do and they have done it.

[17 : 11] They have demonstrated that they are prepared, they are willing to take the consequences, to repent, to put it right. Yea, you've approved yourselves to be clear in this matter and this gives him huge joy because it means that all the the boasting, if you like, all the encouragement that he had in Corinth was not ill-founded.

It means that he was right to be so confident and then because they proved that all their spiritual gifts in which they were admittedly a bit proud were not just shallow and for nothing they were that which worked powerfully within them.

They did change parts. Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, that is the individual who was having the affair with his stepmother, nor for his cause that suffered wrong.

Now the fact that it says his cause that suffered wrong, that almost certainly implies the individual's father, which would mean that his father is still alive.

Now this, if you like, compounds the sin. It's bad enough if we had understood in 1 Corinthians 5 that the individual was having an affair with his stepmother and his father was now dead.

[18 : 28] That would still be a forbidden relationship. But if the father is still alive, then that compounds, it makes it even worse. But Paul is saying, I wasn't writing just for his sake that was the guilty party.

It wasn't just to come down on him like a panoply. It wasn't just to defend the one who had been wronged because his wife was having an affair with his son. But rather, that our care for you in the sight of God might appear out to you so that you could see that we actually have a care for you as a church.

It matters to us, me and Titus and everybody else, Paul is saying, it matters to us what you do as a church. It matters to us what you do as a body because if you don't deal with this, the whole body becomes infected.

Now, nowadays, of course, there's a great problem with cancer that affects a lot of people and thankfully we can get it treated and so on. Often these days, there's opportunity for it to be treated.

But it's still a great threat and it's still a great illness. Now, what is the best thing you can do if you happen to detect cancer somewhere in the body? It is that either you can get an operation and or you can get chemotherapy, radiotherapy, what have you.

[19 : 47] You get the troubled cells, you get the diseased cells cut out and removed and you treat the body with radium or whatever else it might be. The worst thing you can do is if you see that there are these cancerous cells growing in the healthy bodies, you say, it's okay, just leave it.

You don't want to put somebody through the hassle of surgery. I mean, James, that's a big traumatic event. That's going to cause an awful lot of hassle. You know, they're way too busy or they don't really want to go through all this kind of hassle.

So just leave it. Just tell them everything's okay. Everything is not okay. And if it's not dealt with, it's going to kill them. But if there is intervention, if there is surgery, if there is treatment and so on, then that person can go on to lead a perfectly healthy life once that has been dealt with.

And what Paul is saying is, we have a desire for you, the church, to be healthy. Again, that's why he wrote to you that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you.

Therefore, we were comforted in your comfort because you dealt with it well. We were greatly encouraged. Yea, and exceedingly, the more joy be for the joy of Titus. He was filled with joy and he told us the situation because his spirit was refreshed by you all and so we were refreshed likewise with his joy.

[21 : 08] For if I boasted anything to any of you, I'm not ashamed and proved right that I was so confident in you currently. But as we speak all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found at truth.

And his inward affection is more abundant toward you while he remember the obedience of you all. I with fear and trembling you received it. I rejoice, therefore, that I have confidence in you in all things.

Now clearly the implication is by the time Titus got to call it, they already received Paul's letter. They weren't sure what sort of reception they were going to get, whether they were going to get in trouble, whether or not there were going to be all kinds of difficulties with the apostle, with his messenger Titus, but they had dealt with it by then.

They had dealt with the problem. And Paul says his confidence in them, he was proved to have been right and he just cannot contain his joy. Now of course there's a whole lot of other things he's still got to deal with in subsequent chapters.

But this chapter is all about the confidence that he has proved to have had in them. How they have obeyed, how they have dealt with an issue that was threatening to be the death of them as a church.

[22 : 21] Remember that Corinth as a church lived in the midst of a sin city. Corinth itself was a sink of iniquity.

The fact that there was a Christian church at all in a city like that was testimony to the power of the gospel. I don't know what sort of, what sort of equivalent you'd have nowadays.

I don't know whether you'd think in terms of the red light area of Amsterdam or something like that and you find there's a Christian church planted in the midst of that. Or some other, they said all of our cities, all of our towns have areas of iniquity and sin and so on.

But where the sin was at its most dense, its most intense, that's where Corinth, the church of Jesus Christ was planted. It was like a light in darkness.

It was like a little blossoming flower in the desert. And then there was the danger of it all shrubbling up and being killed. But thanks be to God, Paul is saying, that they dealt with the problem, they dealt with the sin and his joy in them is now overflowing.

[23 : 27] And Titus is likewise delighted, his inward affection is more abundant towards you when he remembers the obedience of you all and with fear and trembling you received him. what we find that the central point of this chapter is that the different types if you like of repentance there is the sorrow of the world which worketh death it doesn't bring any benefit really with it at all and you think of the equivalent of Judas there who was filled with remorse at the end of the end result and that was just death.

Then you've got the type A and the type B repentance. Type B is that which is a change of mind a change of thought it is sorrowing perhaps change of mind and regret but it's not the powerful complete change of direction which is repentance unto salvation.

And this is what the Corinthians were able to exhibit. Such was their faith they recognised that when they had to change they were given the power and the strength to do so.

Now sadly that may be one of the tests when it comes to a crisis maybe one of the reasons why the Lord may sometimes allow us to be in a crisis to test and to see that our faith is the real faith is a faith that will give power to have this complete change of direction from maybe where we were going before demonstrate that we have what is needed.

It's like for example if the emergency services are doing drills for whether it's a coast guard or a lifeboat or a fire or whatever they can't just turn up with a fire or an emergency and hope everything will go okay they have to be trained they have to be drilled they have to go through all the different formats all the different requirements and they train and they test and they drill so that when the time comes for a real emergency it will be seen whether or not they've been serious about what they applied themselves to or whether they were just sort of mucking about and being as amateurs sort of not really taking it seriously but if they have applied themselves properly then come the emergency the training will kick in and they will respond appropriately so likewise for the believer come an emergency he or she will be seen to have or not have the true repentant faith of the true believer that will turn their right around and that will point them in the direction they should be going in

[26 : 05] I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things Paul is finding them to have true believing faith and he rejoices in that despite the crisis that they faced that crisis has been dealt with that crisis is now in the past if you may be facing a crisis of faith if you may be facing a crisis in your life it may be that the Lord is simply testing whether or not you are prepared to completely obey him in the midst of whatever that crisis may be and to bring you out through the other side to enable you to say yes the Lord did bring me through the Lord did bless obedience to him we will never benefit from going against the Lord going against his word going away from him it is only ever faithfulness to him that will bring blessing and cause us to rejoice and have confidence as Paul says in all things let us pray next time well yeah well