

2 Corinthians 7

Written by K B Napier

Monday, 13 February 2017 15:31

“...filled with comfort...”

I first attended a church about two weeks after I was born. Church attendance was a part of my life, as it was for almost everyone in the 1950's and 1960's. In those days, with very few exceptions, we all accepted the status quo and simply attended.

Then in the mid 1960's things began to change for me... and the changes will never stop. What started these changes? I was saved! After that my view of 'church' began to alter, slowly at first, and gaining momentum until the day I decided that enough was enough. At that point, my perception of 'church' was given not by my peers, but by scripture alone.

Then began a period of anxiety, but this lasted for only two or three years. It was a transition period, when I cast off decades of handed-down beliefs and practices and gained in scriptural knowledge and actions. This literally changed my whole life, and continues to do so. Today, it is true to say that everything I do arises not from human ambition, but from scriptural truth and its required necessity.

For example, when I completed my first degree the obvious path was to move to England or even abroad, where my income would increase rapidly. But, I was constrained to remain where I was because God had called me to support our small church. Those within our church moved away and gained monetarily, but I had to remain where I was, knowing that whilst my job prospects were curtailed and my income actually grew less, I was doing God's will.

God's will meant serving those in our small church – they might move away, but I did not have that option. Whatever it cost, I had to remain. But, an even bigger cost then arose, which led to my being shunned by every single pastor in the city. That was when I opposed the Toronto Blessing in the 1990s. Suddenly my name was known everywhere and was blackened as a result. My task under God was to expose and oppose the vile movement of Satan that masqueraded as the work of the Holy Spirit. This I did night and day for the 3 to 4 years it took for the 'Blessing' to do its work of pillage and plunder.

When that task was completed I was alone as a pastor with enemies on all sides – arising from the brethren! After just a short while, God then led me to expose and oppose the Alpha course, which I did and continue to do. In both cases I had to enter into the fight, not because I wanted

2 Corinthians 7

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to, but because God commanded me to do so. Yes, I feared the 'terms of engagement' that effectively led to me becoming a perceived source of spiritual poison in my own home city and elsewhere. Yet, I had to continue. And, as I continue this work, the false perception persists, as one of my major tasks is to teach the total sovereignty of God. How it is hated!

Few Christians understand what this really means... if taken scripturally, it means that human beings have no free will (though Christians may choose either good or evil) and predestination is so complete as to be frightening to many. To teach this in all its awesome vastness is to invite exclusion at the hands of fellow Christians, let alone unbelievers. Even so, it must be done. I am fully aware that my stance gives me a human status no higher than that of filth underfoot, with the extra effect of reducing my income to almost nil. But, I have to do it, or know the wrath of God or, even worse, the loss of His active presence in my life.

I say all this because I can identify with Paul. No, I do not mean I think I am another Paul... I mean that I know what he had to go through in part and know what it means to preach the truth against all the odds. Like him I know I have "wronged no man" and have "corrupted no man". Though I speak often with "boldness of speech", few know that when I do so my flesh "(has) no rest" but I am "troubled on every side" because "without (were) fightings, within (were) fears".

In my ministry I am acutely aware that some of what I say will hurt others. As Paul said, "I made you sorry with a letter". Like him, though, I cannot say I am sorry to have said those things, because, like Paul, I can rejoice when "ye sorrowed to repentance". Few do so, but those who repent and follow Christ truly, this is sufficient reward for years of privation and attacks on my person and character.

The whole purpose of my ministry is that some may sorrow "after a godly sort" leading to a "vehement desire" after Christ and His ways. Not many understand the reasons behind all this activity on my part – or even on the part of Paul, who was also greatly misunderstood. Paul did not write his epistles particularly for the sake of the one doing the wrong, or even for the one who was wronged (verse 12), but that his Christian care for them could be made obvious.

For myself, my aim is to help lead fellow Believers into a proper perspective of God's word, so that they may repent of error and know real scriptural truth. This is my way of showing love and care toward my brethren. If I did it all for my own sake, I would be quite rich by now, by preaching a mixture of error and truth and gaining favour amongst my peers! If I did that I would be well liked and amongst the 'leaders' in church society. If I did that I would have the earthly

2 Corinthians 7

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power and status so many desire and work for, even many of the 'best' of preachers!

A genuine Christian ministry looks out for the good of others, not for ones' self. The minister who acts out this maxim may (but not necessarily) lose everything, that some might know truth and act upon it. He will not gain many friends, and will certainly not have status in the Church at large. But, he will be known by God and loved by Him. This is not just for those who are called 'ministers' – it is for every single Christian in the world. If we all looked out for the spiritual and even physical advancement of others, then our eyes would not dwell on ourselves and our meagre human ambitions. Then, we will genuinely rejoice when others come to know and live the true Christian path.

Verses 1-3

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.

2.

Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.

3.

I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said it before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you."

In the previous chapter Paul spoke of the need for us to be clean before God, that He might live within us. We are His temple, so we must not corrupt His environment, our bodies. The result is our eternal rest in Heaven. Having therefore these promises, says Paul, let us be cleansed and display perfect holiness as a sign of our fear of God. Note that Paul is not condemning the Corinthians but calls them "dearly beloved".

The promises of God are for our good and benefit, not for ill. So why avoid them by doing wrong? Some think that the words "cleanse ourselves" are proof that we have free will. This is not so. This cleansing, *katharizo*, is to be purged from all stain and dirt, the dirtiness of soul

2 Corinthians 7

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created by sin, and to dedicate our lives to God.

It is based on the idea of *katharos*, suggesting a vine pruned to bear good fruit, or something that bears no guilt. We know from other texts that only God can cleanse us through the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we cannot choose, ourselves, to be cleansed. Rather, we can only obey the Lord when He prompts us to repent. Thus, the pre-eminence of God and His sovereignty remain intact and supreme, not anything we can do of our own volition.

We must be cleansed from all 'filthiness', *molusmos*, of the flesh, *sarx*. By 'filthiness' is meant something that defiles the soul or the flesh, or an activity that can lead to such defilement. Therefore, even an inward desire is sufficient to bring defilement upon ones' self. When we do this we *moluno* – pollute and contaminate ourselves. In the New Testament this particularly speaks of fornication and adultery, but it can be anything that leads us away from God by sin. It is supposed that this is based on the idea of being completely black, *melas* (the colour attributed to sin). We must refrain from making ourselves tainted in either spirit/soul or body, and so this covers a very wide area of activity.

Rather than enter into things that cause us to sin, we should perfect holiness. This is ongoing, as the word 'perfecting' suggests. The holiness is moral purity, *hagiosune*, that leads to us being 'holy things' or saints, *hagios*. We must continually perfect ourselves to achieve this: *epiteleo* – accomplish and execute every moment, to impose such a life upon ourselves.

"*Choreo*" urges Paul – receive us (that is, the whole group of Apostles), turn yourselves toward us and give us space in your lives and hearts. Your lives have been well prepared by us, *chora*, and you are ready to be planted with truth.

After all, says Paul, we have done wrong to no-one, and have not acted wickedly or unjustly. No human being can claim to be perfect in every outcome. Any preacher might unwittingly hurt another by an action or word that is not from God. This, however, ought to be rare if the preacher's aim is to protect and build up those he speaks to. As such he will not be *adikos* – deceitful, as so many are today.

2 Corinthians 7

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Paul says they have corrupted no-one. They have not *phtheiro*: defiled in order to destroy. They have not misled any of the churches into moving against God (as is the case with true charismatics and ecumenists). Nor have they

pleonekteo

: taken advantage by making themselves superior and going outside their bounds by claiming personal followers, and so gaining something,

pleonektes

, and being greedy for more, whether it is power, money or status. The Apostles are guilty of none of these things, he says.

I am not telling you this to condemn (*katakrisis*) you, he says, or to punish, *katakrino*. His purpose is to present his own life as an example to follow, so that they might see the wickedness in their own lives and repent. This is an act of love, not of censure. In my own ministry I know that I act for the same reasons, though often misunderstood in the process. It is all a part of the general discipline of the Church, where each of us is subject to the other, that we may learn and repent and come to the true path together. Therefore, what appears to be censure is really an act of love to bring someone back to God's way.

Paul reminds them he has told them before that, if necessary, the Apostles would even die for them, for the hearts (inward desires and thoughts) of the Apostles are with them always. This, of course, became a reality as a number of them did die for their beliefs and pastoral care for Christians, something they would not have done unless they truly cared for those they preached to.

Verses 4-8

1.

"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.

2.

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.

3.

2 Corinthians 7

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Monday, 13 February 2017 15:31

Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

4.

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.

5.

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.”

With the love and care the Apostles had for the Corinthians as a background, Paul says he speaks with immense ‘boldness’, *parrhesia*, confidence with freedom of expression. He is open and completely honest with them, because he wants their well-being, not his own advancement. In this he is fearless. The minister who preaches truth has this outward godly fearlessness, yet can know temporary inward fear. Like Paul, very often I teach with utter outer confidence, when my inward self is shaking with fear because of the consequences.

Paul even glories in them, rejoicing that they belong to the Lord and are growing in grace every day, despite their obvious errors. Their overall aim, to be like Christ, is greater than their departures into sin, so Paul is “filled with comfort” or encouragement.

Very often in our Christian walk we come across weak Christians who seem always to fail and be anxious. Their fall into sin seems greater than their desire to live in purity. Yet, we must rejoice they are saved and, despite their many and continuing failures, they belong to God and sincerely wish to live for Him, even in the midst of their sins. We cannot condone their sins, but we can take encouragement that they are saved and, though weak, they really do want to be holy. This is God’s way, not ours!

Because Paul knows the Corinthians are saved and, however erratically, are living for the Lord, he is able to put up with all the persecutions and tribulation he suffers as he preaches and

2 Corinthians 7

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Monday, 13 February 2017 15:31

travels in his ministry. As he says, when they (i.e. “we”, indicating a larger party rather than a lone Apostle) reached Macedonia, their flesh had no rest. Their bodies and minds were harassed continually as other texts prove. They suffered beatings and deprivation, hunger and thirst. These arduous conditions were continuous, as the term “no rest”, *anesis* – easing, relaxing – indicates, often leaving them ‘sinking’, *aniemi*

. Their love for the saved came at a great price!

They were troubled, or knew distress, from every quarter and in all situations. Few Christian preachers have experienced this kind of trouble! As they travelled through Macedonia, they were subjected to continual distress, physically and mentally, with ‘fightings... without’... strife, contention, actual physical attacks, and knew ‘fears... within’... *phobos*; real dread and terror in their souls (hearts and minds:

esother

). Even so, they knew spiritual peace and joy! Do you understand this kind of tension between outward terror and distress, inward fear, and spiritual joy? Do you experience it? If not, meditate on the words and come to grips with them, for they hold the key to your own well-being.

As they were being oppressed from all sides, God sent Titus to them and they knew they were not alone. He was called to their side, *parakaleo*, as an encouragement. And, when Titus related to Paul and the others, the spiritual growth of the Corinthians, they were all delighted and made joyful, though they themselves were being persecuted. I know what this means. Often, just one letter from a Christian who becomes obedient because of this ministry, is sufficient to give me fresh impetus though I am oppressed from all sides.

Titus was overjoyed by the Corinthians, and this joy spread to Paul and the others, like a balm in battle. Titus was able to tell Paul that though the Corinthians were indeed failing at times, their “earnest desire” was true and growing. They had a “fervent mind” toward Paul, and this gave him an immense boost. In this context a ‘fervent mind’ refers to a zealous love for God involving a change of life for the better. Many of us fail daily, yet, if our hearts are inwardly striving toward God, He recognises this, even when others around us do not. All they see is failure and sin, whereas our inward desire is known to God, Who gives us His presence and assurance that though we are failing, He still loves us.

The Christian who fails many times and has little standing amongst his Christian peers, should be seen to lament or grieve over his constant sinning. This is the clue to his actual state before God. The one who constantly fails and never grieves (*odurmos*) over it, must be suspect. It is this often small indication that should cause us to rejoice even over the most difficult and failing

2 Corinthians 7

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Monday, 13 February 2017 15:31

of Believers.

Paul says he knows he had made them 'sorry with a letter'. He had caused them sorrow, *lupeo*, which gave them inward grief; he had offended them. I am often accused of doing this! But, I can say, with Paul, "I do not repent", or *melo* – "I do not care". He has already said that he loved them all and cared deeply for them. So, when he says he did not care that he offended them, he meant he did so for their own good, and so it did not matter if they felt offended by his words.

In my own ministry *of course* I care if I offend. It is the last thing in the world I wish to do... but, as with Paul, if my desire is to see Christians repent and grow spiritually, and the way to do so is to rebuke them or to teach what they do not wish to hear, then so be it. I 'will not care' if it offends, just as I will not care if I cause a bruise on the arm of a man I drag from the edge of a pit, to stop him from falling in and killing himself! As I have to tell people on many occasions – do not confuse my outward words with the desires in my heart! I have no wish to hurt, but if people are hurt by the truth (which is there to bring us to peace with God), it cannot be helped.

And yet, Paul says, though I am not sorry for saying what I said, I did feel sorrow that you felt so sad. In the same way, I am never sorry for speaking the truth of God, though I always feel sadness that others are grieved by the words. Can you see what is meant in all this? Paul did not dwell on the sadness he had caused, because the sadness was only for a short while, until the Corinthians had seen sense and repented.

Verses 9-12

1.

"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.

2.

For godly sorrow works repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

3.

2 Corinthians 7

Written by K B Napier
Monday, 13 February 2017 15:31

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.

4.

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

As Paul explains, he did not rejoice that he had made the Corinthians feel grieved – he rejoiced that they were grieved enough to later repent. The sorrow they felt, and possibly even anger against Paul (something I know in my own life!), was “after a godly manner”. That is, their hearts were touched by God and caused to change, firstly by repentance and then by holiness. Thus, says Paul, though you felt affronted by my words, God had a purpose in them. They repented and again lived holy lives, so the words of Paul had a good end and did not ‘damage’ them – *ze mioo*, cause them to suffer loss or be injured.

Indeed, it is simply not possible for a preacher to cause harm to another by telling them what God’s word says. In my experience only those who remain defiant and reject God’s word remain affronted and grieved by my words. They remain grieved because they will not submit to the truths I have given them, which are God’s words, not my own. They therefore harm themselves. I am not the agent of their self-harm, because I only tell them what God says in His word, which is ‘life unto life’, not ‘death unto death’.

Godly sorrow always leads to repentance (and so to holiness). Those who refuse to show godly sorrow will suffer lack of God’s presence and direct care. They may show anger toward the preacher who gives them the truth. They will know grief in their lives and an inner loss of peace. This shows us that their grief is not godly, but is human, which ‘worketh death’.

The Corinthians sorrowed ‘after a godly sort’ (verse 11), which led to ‘carefulness’, *spoude*, a diligence and care speedily sought after and acted out. They turned about and quickly wanted peace with God. They were then able to ‘clear’ themselves,

2 Corinthians 7

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aplogia

, defend their beliefs and actions with scriptural reasons. They were irritated and disturbed,

aganaktesis

, by their sins, and knew a dread, fearing God. And so their sins were replaced by a 'vehement desire', or intense longing,

epipothesis

, to do what was holy (from

potheo

, to yearn).

All of this turned to a zeal, *zeLOS*, giving them minds on fire for God and His service. Suddenly, they were excited by Him and wanted to do everything they could to live as they ought. At last, they were showing spiritual life!

What 'revenge' they showed... *ekdikesis*: based on *ekdikeyo*, meaning to do justice, to defend another, to punish for a wrong. They punished themselves, as Paul had said previously. In all these responses, says Paul, they had cleared themselves,

hagnos

, become pure from worldliness, and so chaste and clean before God. Note that none of this is possible until the process had been endured: firstly being told of their sin, then listening to the rebuke and repenting. Only then comes zeal and holiness, proving that one has come to the truth.

So, says Paul, when I wrote to you it was not really to be on the side of the wrongdoer, *or* on the side of the one who had been wronged. He had written to show them he cared deeply for their spiritual, mental and physical well-being. This was 'in the sight of God', so his motives were pure and just, even if his words caused them distress.

Verses 13-16

1.

"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.

2.

For if I 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.

2 Corinthians 7

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Monday, 13 February 2017 15:31

3.

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.

4.

I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.”

For these reasons, then, the Apostles were “comforted in your comfort”. They were encouraged, *parakaleo*, by their comfort, *paraklesis*, or stirring argument in their defence. This suggests to us that Titus did not just give the Apostles a third party report, but also a report prepared by the Corinthians themselves, along with evidence from their lives, seen by Titus. So vivid was this change by the Corinthians, that Titus was refreshed in spirit by them. He knew *anapauro*

, a state of rest from his labours because they had listened and obeyed. He no longer had to strive with them. This joy and excitement was enough to give the beleaguered Apostles much joy, too, so they were also refreshed.

Because of these wonderful reports, Paul says he is not ashamed to boast about them. That is, his former joy has not been spurned by their sinfulness. Instead, his joy has proved to be well founded. They were living proof that his words from God had found a home in their hearts, for they had changed.

Titus, he proclaims, now had an even firmer sense of affection toward them. They had not let him down, but surpassed anything he hoped for. So, his feelings for them had increased. He told Paul of their obedience to God, and the way in which they welcomed him in ‘fear and trembling’. I know of few Christians who would wait thus to see a preacher or teacher!

How many, having done wrong and then repented, want a preacher or teacher to see proof of their repentance? Most are too arrogant. But, the Corinthians had the fear of God in their hearts and were both afraid and excited to see Titus, who came to them by God’s will. They felt the inner compulsion to show him they had changed after reading Paul’s first epistle. Such was their desire to show their changed state, they were trembling, *tromos*, quaking with fear, because

2 Corinthians 7

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Monday, 13 February 2017 15:31

they needed assurance that their change was fruitful and approved by God.

Paul at last gives them their approval. He says he is rejoiced by what they had done and had every confidence or trust in their future behaviour and lives. This does not mean a preacher or teacher has power in his own person to approve or disapprove of the actions of other Christians. He means that because he preached God's words to them, they were compelled to obey. If they then obeyed, they were obeying the words given by Paul, but this obedience was to God, Who gave the words to Paul. Because their repentance was godly, as were the changes in their lives, he was able to comfort them and approve their lives. This he did on God's behalf, as His servant, not by his own authority.

It is right that sinners should feel dread when faced with God's called preachers, because they are faced with one who warns them of the consequences of their sins. Preachers who teach the truth can also commend Christians who repent and turn their lives around. Paul, then, was acting within the authority given by God.

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