

06. 2 Corinthians 5:20 – 7:16



Paul appeals to them to be reconciled (5:20 - 6:13)

2 Corinthians 5:20

So we are ambassadors for the Messiah, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of the Messiah, be reconciled to God.

Paul has just concluded a long section of his letter in which he has been speaking of his ministry as an apostle and defending it against his accusers. Those who are dismissing his ministry are also threatening the gospel itself. Now Paul moves from explanation and defence to exhortation.

It is as the ambassador of the Messiah whose words are the words of God himself that Paul appeals to the Corinthians to ‘be reconciled with God’.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

So we are ambassadors for the Messiah, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of the Messiah, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The authority with which Paul makes his appeal is the authority of Christ whom God ‘made sin’ in the sense that he shared with us the consequences of the human condition, and in the sense that he was, like us, a victim of sin, for it was sin that crucified him (see Romans 8:3 where Paul speaks of Jesus’ ‘sinful flesh’).

Jesus experienced alienation from God, including the alienation that culminates in death.

Jesus knew what it means to share our weaknesses, our temptations, our disappointments, our suffering and our dying. He embraced us in our sin, he took our part, he stood beside us, he ate and drank with us.

Yet in all this Jesus remained sinless. He refused to stop loving. He refused to be distracted. He refused to seek substitutes. He did not give in to temptation. He kept believing in God and he kept believing in people. He kept loving, unto death.

That is why he can appeal to us, knowing that we know that he understands our condition and that he has shown us that there is another way to be human. We do not have to sin. Through his love and the gift of his Spirit we, like him, can be filled with the righteousness that God is offering us.

To dare to believe that God wishes us to be filled with this righteousness, we needed to be loved convincingly by one who, in God's name, embraced us in our sin. Jesus did not sin: he continued to do his Father's will and to respond in love to the circumstances of his life, including those brought upon him by human sinfulness. Though himself innocent of sin, he embraced sinners and was condemned to death by people who accused him of being one.

Because he bore our condition without sinning, and because he loved us so intimately as to share with us the communion of love which he experienced in the Spirit, we can believe that, in union with him we are invited to share his righteousness. This is the message of the cross. This is the gospel preached by Paul.

The Corinthians can live in the right relationship to God (see Galatians 2:15-21). In his previous letter, Paul said that God made Jesus their righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). Here he tells them that by union with Jesus they can experience this same righteousness that is from God, and that always remains God's, for it always remains God's gift to them.

2 Corinthians 6:1-4

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you” (Isaiah 49:8). See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way

What a tragedy it would be to continue wasting precious days that could be filled with love. What a tragedy it would be to spend our days halfheartedly when we could have our hearts filled with his love.

2 Corinthians 6:4-5

As servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger

Having defended his apostolic commission, and having used it to summon them to repentance, Paul is not afraid to remind them of all that he has had to endure. He presents it as proof of the authenticity of his commission, and as proof of his love for them. He does so to strengthen their affection for him, in order that their faith in the gospel which he preached to them may be more secure. Just as Jesus endured suffering in faith, hope and love, so Paul, as God's servant (διάκονος) commissioned to proclaim the 'message of the cross' as the revelation of God's 'power to save', must endure weakness and suffering in love (see 1:6; 2:14-16; 4:7-12; 1 Corinthians 4:9-13).

Paul speaks first of his ‘**afflictions**’. He has already spoken of them in this letter (1:4), both the afflictions he met with in Asia (1:8), and the afflictions he has suffered because of the pain caused him by the Corinthians themselves (2:4). He has spoken, too, of his ‘hardships’ (1Corinthians 7:26). Both words are used by Paul of the struggle that precedes the approaching final judgment. Luke records a flogging that Paul endured at Philippi (Acts 16:23,37) where Paul was also imprisoned. Luke records many occasions on which Paul was caught up in scenes of mob violence, including Corinth (Acts 18:12) and Ephesus (Acts 19:29). Paul’s ‘**labours**’ include his constant hard work to secure a living (1 Corinthians 4:12), but refer also to the way in which he has applied himself to his ministry (1 Corinthians 15:10). This has meant sleepless nights and going hungry.

2 Corinthians 6:6-7

As servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech

‘Purity’ refers in a total way to the quality a person has by virtue of the presence of the Holy Spirit. It speaks of reverence and awe, as well as of moral probity. ‘Knowledge’ refers especially to Paul’s knowledge of God in Christ (see 2:14). ‘Patience’ and ‘kindness’ are the two primary qualities of divine love as listed by Paul in his previous letter (1Corinthians 13:4). They are also fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), who empowers Paul’s ministry (see 3:8). Throughout this letter Paul has been assuring them of his ‘genuine love’ (2:4; 5:13) and ‘truthful speech’ (1:12; 2:17). If we should translate the latter expression as the ‘word of truth’, Paul would be referring to the gospel which is about the truth of God’s love revealed in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:4).

2 Corinthians 6:7

We have commended ourselves by the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left;

The Corinthians have experienced ‘the power of God’ in Paul’s ministry because of the action of the Spirit. Paul has carried out his commission, as they well know, because of the communion which he experiences with God. This is his ‘righteousness’. This is the power that he wields and this is his defence however others may treat him and whatever others may think of him.

2 Corinthians 6:8-10

in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

He points out the failure of his opponents to see who he really is. He has been accused of being an imposter, lacking the proper letters of accreditation (3:1), and perhaps also mishandling money. People have made fun of the Corinthians for taking notice of one who is not a famous public speaker. His life has been in danger from others, and perhaps also from his own physical condition. These things are judged to be signs of divine disapproval and are seen as punishment. They see Paul as spiritually deficient and materially of no consideration, yet he can rightly claim that he enriches many and there is nothing that is not his.

2 Corinthians 6:11-13

We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians;
our heart is wide open to you.

There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours.

In return — I speak as to children —
open wide your hearts also.

Paul is appealing to them with all his affection to win them for Jesus. The feeling takes us back to the opening verses of the letter (1:3-11). It is a cry from the heart of a father to his spiritual children. He speaks openly to them, and from a heart that has expanded as he has enfolded each of them in love. If there is a restriction of affections it is on their part, not on his. He pleads with them to respond to him with similar affection.

2 Corinthians 6:14-16

Do not be misyoked with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? (Satan, who threw off God's yoke) Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people' [Leviticus 26:12; Ezekiel 37:27]

The believer should be in the world as Jesus was in the world, loving the world, manifesting another possibility of living by bringing to bear the redeeming power and love of God's Spirit. The believer, however, must not live by the values of unbelievers, who are trapped in lawlessness and darkness. The Christian lifestyle should be characterised by 'righteousness' and 'light'.

2 Corinthians 6:17 – 7:1

Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean (Isaiah 52:11); then I will welcome you, and I will be your father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Samuel 7:14). Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

Addressing them as ‘**beloved**’ and speaking as one of them, Paul stresses the importance of being cleansed from defilement, for it affects not only our body – our relationship with the world – but more importantly our relationship with the Spirit (see 1 Cor 7:34). We are to live a life of ‘holiness’ (see 1 Cor 7:34), full of reverent awe, and in the presence of God (see 5:11).

2 Corinthians 7:2-4

Make room in your hearts for us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. I often boast about you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with consolation; I am overjoyed in all our affliction.

Once again Paul expresses his deep affection for the Corinthians. Earlier he wrote of 'the abundant love that I have for you' (2:4). He spoke of the sufferings that he was undergoing so that there may be 'life in you' (4:12). He spoke of his confidence that in being raised with Christ he would also be 'with you' (4:14). And here he writes: 'I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together'. With the intense expression of appreciation, consolation and joy in verse four we are back with the feeling with which Paul began this letter (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

2 Corinthians 7:5-10

For even when we came into **Macedonia**, our bodies (σὰρξ) had no rest, but we were afflicted in every way — disputes without and fears within. But God, who consoles the downcast, consoled us by the arrival of **Titus**, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was consoled about you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter [lost], though only briefly.

Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because **your grief led to repentance**; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

This passage gives us the explanation we have been waiting for, the reason for Paul's unusual opening to his letter with its stress on consolation, and the reason for his return to the theme in 7:4. God, who 'has compassion on his suffering ones' (Isaiah 49:13), lifted Paul's anxiety by bringing Titus safely to him with the good news that the Corinthians were longing to see Paul to restore their earlier close relationship. They regretted that their past treatment of him had hurt Paul so much that he didn't feel that he could visit them as planned. They were sorry that they had been so slow to discipline the person who was behind the attack on Paul

2 Corinthians 7:11-13

For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves guiltless in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, nor on account of the one who was wronged, but in order that your zeal for us might be made known to you before God. In this we find comfort. In addition to our own consolation, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by all of you.

2 Corinthians 7:14-16

For if I have been somewhat boastful about you to him, I was not disgraced; but just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting to Titus has proved true as well. And his heart goes out all the more to you, as he remembers the obedience of all of you, and how you welcomed him with fear and trembling. I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.