

The first verse in chapter seven is really the conclusion of the promises made in the preceding chapter. *¹ Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* 2 Corinthians 7:1 It begins, “*Since we have these promises,*” so we should go back and look at the promises presented to us from the Scriptures Paul quoted from the Old Testament. The first is that God declared He would make His dwelling among us and walk among us (Leviticus 26:12ⁱ). He did that in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. John the Beloved tells us He tabernacled among us (John 1:14ⁱⁱ). The tent was His human body (5:1,2ⁱⁱⁱ). He literally walked among us, just as He did with Adam and Eve in the Garden.

The implication is that God would restore our state of innocence. God would no longer walk with Adam and Eve as sin separated mankind from God (Isaiah 59:2^{iv}). Remember that to walk in the Biblical sense means to live with. Thus, walk in the Spirit means to live in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16^v). The promise declares a reversal of the fallen state of man. That was made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins. That is why Paul wrote in verse sixteen of the preceding chapter that we are the temple of the living God (6:16a^{vi}). Jesus’ death for our sins made it possible for His Spirit to live in us.

That is why we claim Him as our God. A person’s god is what they live for. If you live for self, you are your own god. If you live for money, money is your god. But if the Spirit of God lives in you, it is possible to live for God who loved you and gave Himself for you (Titus 2:14^{vii}). “I will be their God!” That means so much more than just saying you are a Christian. It is to live with and for God. Then God can claim us as His people. We are adopted into the family of God as the second promise declared.

The Children of Israel were to be the people of God. They were to walk with God like Abraham did (Genesis 17:1^{viii}; Exodus 6:7^{ix}), which is a life of faith (Romans 4:2,3^x). However, most of the nation failed to do so. Theirs was a history of ups and downs, drawing near and turning away from God. But when they rejected Jesus, despite all the signs and fulfillment of Scripture that they could see in His life, we were given a clear picture that with man salvation is impossible (Psalm 89:48^{xi}; Mark 19:25,26^{xii}). We need the Holy Spirit who was promised to be poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:16,17^{xiii}).

There is an interesting moment in the life of Jesus shortly before the crucifixion when the Greeks came to Andrew and Philip (Greek names) and asked to see Jesus. When Jesus heard of the request He did not respond with a yes or no. Instead, *²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.* John 12:23,24 Jesus knew the prophecies that foretold that the Messiah would be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6^{xiv}). He knew that the Jews would reject Him and that He would die for the sins of the world (Matthew 20:28^{xv}). If the Greeks were seeking Him, the time had come for Him to make that possible. The hinge of history was turning from the failure of the chosen ones to keep the Law to the inclusion of the world by faith in the only One to keep the Law and bear our sins. “They shall be my people” was ultimately for the people of faith in God making a way for us to be righteous as Paul explains in Romans 4:9-11^{xvi}. The first promise then that Paul is referring to in 7:1 is that of being our God and us being His people.

Notice that he calls the Corinthians “beloved.” Even though they had listened to doubts about His authority and seemed to have forgotten his example and sacrifice he made for them, they are his beloved. He led many of them to Christ and would not let their stumbling affect that love he had for them. That is how we must be toward our brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of any offenses (Luke 6:37^{xvii}). They should remain beloved to us.

The second promise is if we will come out of the world, separate ourselves from worldliness and refuse to live for self as the rest of the world does, if we will not touch the defiled things of the world represented in the Old Testament by the things declared unclean, then He will welcome us (Isaiah 52:11^{xviii}). That contrasts with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. He will welcome us back into familial relationship.

Some of us did not grow up in healthy, loving families. When I say familial relationship, I mean that God is like a *loving* father who seeks our best interest and knows how to guide us into what is best for us because of His great love for us. He is the perfect Father. **It is because of these promises that we should cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit.** Jesus makes us right in the eyes of God, but we must come out from the world’s ways and cleanse our behavior, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

That means that whatever is pulling us away from yielding to the will of our loving Father, whether physical or spiritual, we should cooperate with Him to cleanse us of those thoughts or actions. If you have doubts whether some thought or action pleases God, look to the Word to see what it says about it. If you are still not sure, it is probably a good sign that you should put it away. If you do not feel good about sharing it with a trusted Christian friend, it is a sign it is not of God. The Word cleanses our hearts and minds, so seek out a Scripture on that subject and memorize it (Psalm 119:11^{xix}). When you are tempted to return to that behavior, quote the Scripture to yourself and ask for God’s help. Cleanse yourself from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. God’s Word aids us to that end (Ephesians 5:26^{xx}).

The last part of the verse, *bringing holiness to completion* is to live out what God has put into you. It is to let the Spirit of God reign in you. It is to have the fear of God, which means to know He disciplines our disobedience out of love for us (Hebrews 12:5.6^{xxi}). It is to understand that He has done so much for us and expects us to respond appropriately to His love and grace and not take it for granted. As Paul said in Romans six, “*Shall we go on sinning that grace may abound? By no means!*” Romans 6:1,2a^{xxii} It is to represent Christ in our work, home, and leisure. Or as Paul said in an earlier passage of this letter, “to let the life of Christ be manifest in our mortal bodies” (4:11^{xxiii}). We must always be yielding to conviction to be moving onward and upward!

² Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. 2 Corinthians 7:2 “In your hearts” is added to the translation because of verse 13 in the previous chapter where Paul asked them to widen their hearts. He claimed they had been restricted in their affections toward him. To this point Paul had been sharing the things he and his team endured for the sake of the gospel and describing their heart and how they were perceived. In this verse he makes clear and bold statements countering the claims of the false teachers.

The three denials most likely give us insight into the worst of the false teachers’ accusations toward Paul. The first was that they had *wronged no one*. We can only imagine how those teachers had claimed Paul wronged them, but from what we read in

the letters, it was probably suggesting Paul wronged them by not telling them of the need to obey the Law, for obedience to the Law promises prosperity. The prosperity preachers of today teach a similar message. One Scripture they often use is *Malachi 3:10*¹⁰ *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.* They may also refer to Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:38³⁸ *give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.*" New Covenant prosperity is spiritual, which infinitely more valuable than physical wealth. I will not go over again why prosperity teaching is an abuse of Scripture. Suffice to say we only need look at the lives of Jesus and the Apostles to see that that teaching is in error. We could also look at the Sermon on the Mount and see a sharp contrast (Luke 6:20^{xxiv}). Paul's teaching had not wronged the Corinthians. He had shown them the truth of the New Covenant.

The second denial was *"we have corrupted no one."* The Greek verb can mean to ruin or destroy a person. The church could not point to anyone whose life was the worse for Paul's teaching. The opposite was true. The Word transforms lives for the better, whereas stirring up greed by preaching works-based salvation often ends in strife.

The third denial was that they had *not taken advantage of anyone.* Paul's team worked with their own hands to support themselves so the Corinthians would not accuse them of preaching for personal gain (1 Corinthians 9:12^{xxv}). The Holy Spirit must have led Paul to do so in Corinth because of the accusations that would be made later by the false teachers. How important it is not to just follow a pattern but to look to the Lord for direction in each situation we face.

³ 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. 2 Corinthians 7:3 Paul is not blaming them for being influenced by the false teachers. He just wants them to know how much he and his team love them. They have the Corinthian congregation in their hearts to live with them and to die with them. In other words, in life or in death they are bound together by unconditional love. That is the heart of a mature believer. They hear and live out Jesus' command to love one another as Jesus loves us (John 15:12^{xxvi}). And how does Jesus love us. We are in His heart to die together and live together with us. Our old nature was crucified with Christ. He died together with us. And now we live in the resurrected Christ and He in us. He lives together with us. We are his tabernacle. That is love!

When we stand before the Lord and give an account of our lives, our rewards will be based on what we did with the Great Command (Matthew 22:36-40^{xxvii}). If we loved God with all our hearts, we will love those He died for. Loving our neighbor as ourselves is only possible if we are in Christ and He is in us. *Agape* is an attribute only those who are in Christ possess as the first fruit of the Spirit in us (Galatians 5:22^{xxviii}).

Paul had sacrificially served the Corinthians. But even when their attitude toward him soured, he did not hold it against them. He is not condemning them. He is sharing how much he loves them because it is love that changes the heart. In 12:15^{xxix} he will tell them that he will most gladly spend and be spent for them even if they love him less for it. That is Jesus' heart in Paul. How do our hearts measure up to that standard? Humbling, is it not? Oh Lord, do that work in us! Help us be willing to be transformed into your image. Widen our hearts to include those whom You have brought into our lives.

⁴ I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. 2 Corinthians 7:4a Paul is writing with great boldness in sharing how much they are loved by him and what he has endured for them. He would not do that unless he knew they were mature enough to hear and receive what he was writing. Thus, he says he has great pride in them. His great boldness is because of the great pride he has in them.

I often know what someone needs to hear, but I cannot tell them because they are too spiritually immature to hear it. It would offend them, and they would misinterpret it. With those who are more mature and solid in their faith I can be bolder in sharing what they need to hear. I am proud that they have grown strong in their faith under my discipleship. By that I mean proud in what the Lord has done in them and their yielding to His hand molding their lives. It fills me with comfort for I know the Lord is making disciples through me and His fruit will remain (John 15:16^{xxx}). I do not fear that they will fall away because they are the Lord's fruit. The Good Shepherd keeps His own.

^{4b} In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy. 2 Corinthians 7:4b Paul has shared about what they endured for the love of the Lord and the church, but he does not want them to think that he regrets the sacrifices they have made. On the contrary, in all their affliction, he is overflowing with joy. Notice that he writes "our affliction" in the plural, his whole team had suffered, but "I", singular, "am overflowing with joy." Apparently, his whole team did not have the maturity of Paul to find joy in the suffering. Paul was following Jesus' command to rejoice when you are persecuted because persecution for Jesus puts you among the prophets (Matthew 5:10-12^{xxx}). It means you are a light in the darkness. And I imagine that Paul's joy lifted the spirits of others on his team who had a hard time joyfully dealing with afflictions.

But do not think this was easy for Paul or that he was always a super saint. Remember that he told them that at one point he was burdened beyond his strength and despaired of life itself (1:8^{xxxii}). We are still in these mortal bodies and resisting the flesh nature.^{xxxiii} Nevertheless, Paul would come to a point of overflowing with joy. The letter now moves on to what they went through and how he came to overflowing joy.

⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. 2 Corinthians 7:5 Sometimes the going gets rough. That is part of life whether you are a Christian or not. Paul's fear within was that Titus had not yet arrived and Paul did not know if the Corinthians had received or rejected his strongly worded letter (2:13^{xxxiv}). This inner fear was not fear for oneself, but concern for the spiritual state of those whom Paul loved. The greater our love for someone, the greater the burden on our heart to see them live in the light.

When physical difficulty combines with spiritual or emotional burden, we are most vulnerable. It is then that we need to completely lean on the Lord and experience His strength. We deny the negativity of the enemy and praise God for who we know Him to be while waiting patiently for God to bring us through. We say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!" Job 13:15 And we continue by faith with what we know He would have us do. Then in God's perfect time the comfort comes.

⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. 2 Corinthians 6:6,7 Paul does not say the fighting without ceased, but the greatest burden was lifted when Titus arrived with good news. Paul did not just credit this to man, but to

God who answers prayer. He pointed to the nature of God declaring that God comforts the downcast.

Why would he make that claim? It is because that is what the Scripture declares. It was God who comforted Abraham by assuring him the promised son would be born even in his old age (Genesis 15:4^{xxxv}). The same God comforted Joseph reminding him of the dream He gave him though all the conditions seemed it would not be fulfilled. It was God who comforted the people of Israel in bondage by telling them God had come to deliver them, and God who calmed their fears at the Red Sea by telling them, “*The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent*” (Exodus 14:14^{xxxvi}). And it was God who told the discouraged prophet Elijah that there were still 7000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:18^{xxxvii}). And we could tell of many more accounts including our own. When I am downcast the Lord often comforts me from the Psalms. I have only to remember His great love for me demonstrated on the cross and I am comforted.

Not only had the Corinthians received the harsh letter, but they received it with longing, with mourning, and with zeal for Paul. They brought Titus great comfort by their godly sorrow, and in turn it brought great comfort to Paul’s team causing Paul to greatly rejoice. The Proverbs tell us ¹² *Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.* Proverbs 13:12 It was certainly a fulfilled desire of Paul’s heart to hear how they received his correction.

⁸ For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. ⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. 2 Corinthians 6:8,9 One of the difficult tasks of God’s under-shepherds is correction because it often causes grief when it is received. But godly grief brings repentance. It is short lived because it results in joy from your communion with God being restored. When we are in sin, we can pray, but we do not want to listen. True communion does not take place. God will not comfort us because it would be blessing our rebellion. But when true repentance takes place, there is the comfort that comes with forgiveness. Communion is restored and we are blessed by letting God speak to our hearts by the Spirit or in His Word.

Verse 8 sounds like Paul regretted sending such a harsh letter. He may have had second thoughts about it being too harsh. But when he heard that it resulted in the fruit of repentance, it was cause for rejoicing. The godly grief was not a loss, but a journey to restoration and joy. The letter turned out to benefit all. May we also be receptive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, to avoid corruption of the gospel that so easily slips into the church. Let each of us guard our heart to see that we are moving onward and upward.

Questions:

- 1 What are the promises referred to in verse 1?
- 2 How can we live the first verse?
- 3 What can Paul’s use of “beloved” teach us?
- 4 How can we clean up our act?
- 5 What does “bring holiness to completion” mean?
- 6 What do the three denials tell us? 7 Is verse 3 how you feel about the family of God?
- 8 How was Paul comforted? 9 How did he find joy in affliction?
- 10 What are the two kinds of grief?

ⁱ **Leviticus 26:12 (ESV)**

¹² And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.

ⁱⁱ **John 1:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

ⁱⁱⁱ **2 Corinthians 5:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,

^{iv} **Isaiah 59:2 (ESV)**

² but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

^v **Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

^{vi} **2 Corinthians 6:16 (ESV)**

^{16a} What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God;

^{vii} **Titus 2:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

^{viii} **Genesis 17:1 (ESV)**

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless,

^{ix} **Exodus 6:7 (ESV)**

⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

^x **Romans 4:2-3 (ESV)**

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

^{xi} **Psalms 89:48 (ESV)**

⁴⁸ What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah

^{xii} **Matthew 19:25-26 (ESV)**

²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

^{xiii} **Acts 2:16-17 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;

^{xiv} **Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)**

⁶ he says: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

^{xv} **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

^{xvi} **Romans 4:9-11 (ESV)**

⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,

^{xvii} **Luke 6:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven;

^{xviii} **Isaiah 52:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.

^{xix} **Psalms 119:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

^{xx} **Ephesians 5:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

^{xxi} **Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

^{xxii} **Romans 6:1-2a (ESV)**

¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ^{2a} By no means!

^{xxiii} **2 Corinthians 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

^{xxiv} **Luke 6:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

^{xxv} **1 Corinthians 9:12 (ESV)**

¹² If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

^{xxvi} **John 15:12 (ESV)**

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

^{xxvii} **Matthew 22:36-40 (ESV)**

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.

³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

^{xxviii} **Galatians 5:22 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

^{xxix} **2 Corinthians 12:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

^{xxx} **John 15:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

^{xxxi} **Matthew 5:10-12 (ESV)**

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

^{xxxii} **2 Corinthians 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

^{xxxiii} **2 Corinthians 2:13 (ESV)**

¹³ my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

^{xxxiii} To be a true minister to men is always to accept new happiness and new distress.... The man who gives himself to other men can never be a wholly sad man; but no more can he be a man of unclouded gladness. To him shall come with every deeper consecration a before untasted joy, but in the same cup shall be mixed a sorrow that it was beyond his power to feel before. Phillips Brooks, *The Influence of Jesus* (London: H.R. Allenson, 1895), p. 191. ^{xxxiii}

^{xxxv} **Genesis 15:4 (ESV)**

⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.”

^{xxxvi} **Exodus 14:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

^{xxxvii} **1 Kings 19:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the

sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”