

**Introduction**

It is at this point that the apostle makes an impassioned plea to the Corinthians to fix their attitude toward him instead of doubting and criticizing him, and that they would separate from those elements that foment such criticism (unbelievers either in their midst or those who come from the outside). This material occupies verses 6:11-7:16.

**1. The Address, v. 11a**

The “O Corinthians” starts a new paragraph. There is actually no “O” in the original, but the idea certainly is conveyed by the verse that this is an **impassioned plea** for them to hear what Paul is saying. Philippians 4:15 and 1 Tim. 1:18 address the recipients of those letters in like fashion, indicating a real interest from the writer to the readers.

There are similar uses with the “O” that address specific groups or individuals in Matt. 15:28, 17:17, Luke 24:25, Acts 1:1, 18:14, 27:21, Gal. 3:1, 1 Tim. 6:11, and 6:20, or a general audience in Rom. 2:1-3, 9:20, and James 2:20.

**2. The Concerned Love of Paul, v. 11b**

Paul’s mouth stands open, he says. To help us understand the meaning of this phrase, understand that the Bible is not talking about an open mouth as in what you do at the dentist, nor just that it is open and saying *something*! Similarly with the next phrase, he is not speaking of an enlarged heart, i.e. the dangerous physical condition. These are **figures of speech** using literal body parts to represent actions or attitudes.

The mouth being open is a **figure for being candid**, open, speaking freely. It is the opposite of such “closed” ways of speaking like veiled speech or duplicitous speech or confusing speech or vague speech or flattering speech. It is open, honest, frank communication. This openness also includes directness and boldness. It deals with what needs to be dealt with. Paul is concerned about them from a pastoral perspective and has spoken and will speak directly to their problem.

The openness of Paul’s speech to them is a result of Paul’s big heart toward them, figurative of his warm affection. It stands broadly opened toward them. And a big heart flows out of an open mouth. Affection leads to speech. Out of the **abundance of the heart** the mouth speaks (Matt. 12:34, Luke 6:45). Remember that the Bible has much to say about our speech. It should be honest, truthful, loving, and gracious among other things (Eph. 4:15, 25; Col. 4:6). A good place to start studying about our speech is James 3.

His **affection is active in spite** of the fact that they were so hard against him. He still loved them! And in spite of the fact that they may have charged him with *not* loving them (2 Cor. 11:11), he did anyway.

**3. The Constrained Love of the Corinthians, v. 12**

Things are very strained in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians. Why is this? This restriction is not caused by Paul. He says you are not restricted in (by) us. In other words, after we are told that Paul’s heart is opened wide to the Corinthians, we also learn that there is nothing that Paul has done to invite their coldness toward him.

Something in their own affections, he says, is limiting them. The word straitened means “restricted” and comes from a Greek word from which our word stenosis comes from (narrowing of an artery or other passageway). Something is crowding out or cramping their love for Paul. I think also that the verse following this paragraph, 6:14, indicates something of what this might be—*sin*, and in particular the sin of going along with unbelievers and being unequally yoked with them. While we cannot get into the details of all that now, we can at least see that Paul is saying “be affectionate toward us...don’t be attached to unbelievers!” It seems as if they appreciate the unbelievers more than they appreciate Paul. Do they have more fellowship with the unbelievers than Paul?!

The bowels here literally refer to the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, and spleen, but not the intestines. This is the seat of affections and emotions in ancient thought. We often use

the term *heart* in this way in our culture. The Bible uses *heart* that way too. So when the KJV ever says “bowels,” just think basically of the heart, not the intestines!

Internally they have to examine themselves and understand what is causing them to not love Paul. They cannot rightly say “It’s your fault Paul” because it was not his fault—it was their own! They have a very small concern and interest in Paul, much smaller than his for them. You cannot accuse Paul of beating around the bush on this one! (Prov. 27:6a)

**4. The Commanded Love, v. 13**

Here is a command for the Corinthians to **reciprocate** the love that Paul has shown them over the years. Reciprocation means to give in return or to respond in like manner. So if someone invites you to dinner this month, you might *reciprocate* with an invitation the next month. Not only activities, but feelings can be reciprocated or mutually shared. The idea is a fair exchange of something for something else.

In this verse, the apostle calls the Corinthians to have a reciprocal love toward him, expressed as having a similarly open heart as Paul does. The recompense or return here is that their love for Paul would match up to his love for them. Paul is saying that **one-way love is not much to write home about!** Unrequited love is not very nice!

**A. Commands to Love in the NT**

Love *can* be commanded, not just felt spontaneously! It is required of us as born-again Christians. Note the different ways (and see Eph. 5:2 when finished reading these):

1. Matt. 5:44 – love your enemies
2. Mark 12:30-31; Rom. 13:9 – love God and your neighbor
3. John 13:34-35, 15:12, 15:17, 1 John 3:23, 2 John 5 – love one another
4. Eph. 5:25, 33, Col. 3:19, Titus 2:4 – love your wife, husband, children
5. 1 Peter 1:22 – love one another fervently with a pure heart
6. 1 Peter 2:17, 1 John 4:21 – love the brotherhood

**B. Spiritual Children**

Here the apostle refers to the Corinthians as his spiritual children. See also 1 Cor. 4:14-15 and Gal. 4:19. This is not to say that any man on earth is our spiritual father (Matt. 23:9), but it is to acknowledge that God does make significant use of people to lead us to saving faith. So it is alright to say you led someone to Jesus. You did not save them, but gave them a pointer in that direction. Paul, the spiritual father, was distressed when his children did not return love to him, and so as dad, he exhorted them to get a right attitude.

**Applications**

So, the Corinthians are told they must become more big-hearted toward Paul and open their affections toward him. If you believe the Bible is inspired of God and inerrant, then he’s right! Their attitude had to change—it was wrong! Maybe you need to evaluate your relationship with someone in this assembly, or in your family, your spouse, or whatever, and **open up your heart** more toward them. Quit being led by feelings to dislike someone, but instead extend your love toward them. And reciprocate the love of others toward you.

Note also that in this paragraph of the Bible, **reconciliation is between people**. In chapter 5, it was *strictly* between God and man, though as I mentioned there, many people try to say the “ministry of reconciliation” has to do with bringing harmony between people in families and churches. That is not the point of chapter 5, but here is an application of it: God reconciled us to himself so that we can be on good terms with each other. As those who are reconciled to God, we ought to be telling others how to be reconciled to God, and not be un-reconciled to each other while we claim to know about reconciliation!

Now that we’ve said that, we can also profitably think about this: what if God were writing these verses to you? God *has* spoken openly to you, his heart *is* wide open to you. But in some way perhaps your love toward him is not as reciprocal as it should be. Whenever other affections for worldly things are, this decreases your capacity to love God properly. That is, you are restricted by your own affections, not by God’s! **Love God!** MAP

## More notes for me

### Introduction

So far in 2 Corinthians, we have learned about God's comfort in suffering and the need to trust in God and not ourselves. We also see that Paul has urged the believers to forgive the man whom they had disciplined earlier as a result of his confrontation with Paul. We've also seen a lot of passages in which Paul has defended his ministry against various criticisms. These criticisms seem to include inconsistent travel plans, domineering attitude, and duplicity—none of which the apostle is actually guilty of. He appeals to the content of the New Covenant ministry that he has, along with his manner of carrying out that ministry. The Corinthians themselves are his recommendation letters as they have received his gospel and been saved by it. Along the way, the Bible has mentioned our secure hope of a new body and presence with Christ at death, the great motivations for Christian life and ministry, the wonderful transforming nature of the salvation that we have received, and the reconciliation ministry that we have.

But we are not even half way through the letter yet!

### SET STAGE!

It is important to set the stage for this message on 6:11-13, to explain why the relationship between the apostle and the church is so cool. He had to tell them many things that they needed to fix in 1 Corinthians (list them...especially problem of denial of resurrection, which cannot be done by saved people—Rom. 10:9-10), they doubted his apostleship, they doubted his integrity (reading between the lines), there was the problem of discipline of the errant brother and the completion of that in 2 Cor. 2, the apparent request of the Corinthians for letters of commendation for Paul, etc.

### Note on Verse 12

Note: The NIV translates, "we are not withholding our affection from you, but you...from us." The problem is the verb is the same in both clauses, and "we" is not the subject of either verb—"you" is the subject. It seems to be saying that you are not restrained by us, but you are restrained by yourselves.

I understand that Harris (NIGTC, 2 Corinthians) says that it is not instrumental, rather local, but it seems to my way of understanding the Greek, that the subject of the verb *stenoxwrew* is second person plural, you all. This is the case in both phrases, so they seem to both be talking of "you are not being restricted"...In addition, to repeat the idea from verse 11 seems unnecessary—Paul has just said that his heart is wide open. Now he turns to address them in verse 12, and then the solution in v. 13. At least a logical case can be made for my position, as followed by the NKJV, as over against the NIV.

### Summary of the verse by Harris

Harris: "If there are any feelings of constriction or restraint in our relationship, they are on your side, not mine. I appeal to you as my spiritual children: in fair exchange for my unrestricted affection, give me yours too." (EBC, p. 358).