

Text: 2 Corinthians 7:2-7

Title: Responding Well to Correction

Truth: Handling correction well includes keeping an open heart, thinking not just about yourself, and repenting where needed.

Date/Location: Sunday May 3, 2026 at FBC

Review

Paul has just completed a section where he calls the Corinthians to holiness (6:14-7:1). They have been messing around with teachers of false doctrine and continue to have problems with purity in the church.

He explains that they must not be unequally yoked with unbelieving people because (1) Light and righteousness and Christ have no fellowship, agreement, or partnership with unbelief and (2) God calls us out of darkness to be united with Him and be His people, as His temple. He promises to be with His people, but they must be separated from sin, for without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). With promises like those listed in 6:16, 17, and 18, it is only fitting that we purify ourselves from sin and energetically pursue holiness in our lives.

To apply what we learned, we took an inventory of our lives to see what is there that indicates a lack of love for the Lord, what needs to be cleaned out by means of repentance and holy conduct. Maybe someone in your life needs you to have an open heart toward them instead of a stubborn or angry heart.

Introduction

As we study 2 Corinthians 7:2-7, we are going to see some best practices in terms of responding well to correction.

A. After the prior section, Paul returns to the theme of 6:11-13 where he asks them to open their hearts and have full love for him. The whole problem started because the Corinthians were living in sin, disrespecting the apostle, and the question was, "How are they going to handle the correction that Paul gives?" Evidently after the attempts to help them, there are still some problems in the church. But if you read 7:5-7, you will notice that the Christians there have

progressed. And then if you read 7:8-12, you will see that they made even more progress, including becoming truly repentant about their opposition to Paul and their other sins.

- B. Given this apparent progress, why does Paul open this section by urging the Corinthians to open their heart to him? If they had responded well to his earlier instruction and even had "zeal for [him]," then it seems like it would not be necessary for him to ask them to open their hearts.
- C. But remember, this is not a monolithic group of people. It is a *church*, and a church is not always perfectly united in its thinking. There are people at various places in terms of spiritual maturity. There could be a relatively small number of people messing up the whole thing. Problem people seem to loom large in church situations (when they probably should not get so much attention). There were likely some people who repented about what they did wrong but still do not have good feelings for the man who confronted them about their sin.
- D. This section of Scripture is difficult for me because it deals with relationships. It is difficult to explain in a linear, scientific, engineering kind of way.

This is because in human relationships, things are not black and white, there is nuance and complication and baggage and hurt and different perspectives. Sometimes one side is right and the other wrong; sometimes one is right but wrong in manner; sometimes both are wrong; sometimes there is lopsided affection or love. It can be messy.

- E. Imagine that Paul has given them some hard truth and called them to change their thinking, and eventually they came around to realize that they were wrong and needed to repent. But at the same time, they *still* retained some cold feelings toward Paul. They may have realized they sinned, and were sorry about that, and even had a level of concern for Paul as a servant of God, but still they "felt a way" about Paul because of how he addressed them. There is progress, but not a full restoration, and full reconciliation—not partial reconciliation—is Paul's aim because He wants them to be able to hear him well as he teaches Biblical truth.

Besides that, I am sure he just wants to share peaceful and joyful fellowship with them.

F. If you think about it for a second, this applies to your life and to mine. There are people who have had some feeling about us, or we about them. Maybe we have improved those feelings, or “let it go” or whatever, but we have not fully been restored. You say, or the other person *says*, “I have no problem with so-and-so.” But you actually still *do* have some kind of problem. You do not care to talk or enjoy fellowship. You would not listen to them. You have gone off into your world and left that person behind. Your heart is not in fact truly open or warm toward them. Paul is taking some time to address this matter here, with much profit for us.

You might have a similar hard feeling toward a person because they offered you correction. This relational dynamic is quite common. From what Paul writes to the Corinthians, we can learn several ways to respond well when someone corrects us.

I. Respond with an Open Heart, v. 2-4

A. The section opens with a command: open your hearts to us. Make room in your inmost being and affection for us. This resumes the theme of 6:11-13, so it must be important.

B. Paul refutes any claim that he had wronged the people in the church—therefore there is no danger in restoring affection for Paul. Apparently, some were claiming that he had wronged them, corrupted them, or cheated them. These accusations could be entirely false or have some aspect of truth to them that the accusers misinterpreted. Here is a speculation: they might have given up sinful jobs or possessions, and false teachers were telling them they did not have to do that, so they began to feel defrauded by Paul. But he appeals to them to *think*. He had a clear conscience because he did not:

1. Wrong anyone. 2. Corrupt anyone. 3. Cheat anyone.

There was no financial malfeasance or misfeasance on Paul’s part, no moral corruption or wrong teaching.

- C. The church as a whole knew this in their hearts. But there were a few raising a stink about these kinds of things.
- D. Paul assures them that he is not condemning them, even if some did charge Paul with corruption. Instead, Paul says, you all are in our hearts. We love you, and we would live with you, or even die side by side with you. Perhaps he means that he is with them even to death and will be with them in resurrection life as well. In any case, there is nothing wrong with Paul's feelings toward them.
- E. In fact, Paul explains in verse 4 that he has very good feelings toward them. He:
1. He had enough confidence in God's work in their lives and their profession of faith that he spoke with them very frankly. Maybe this frankness caused some of the problems. People do not often like to be told straight-up what they are doing incorrectly in the moral realm. Frankness or *boldness* is the same word he used in 3:12, where he indicates an unreserved speech in promoting the gospel. He reflects on all of his speech toward them, including and especially his recent "severe letter" delivered by the hand of Titus. Paul indicates that he speaks very plainly to the Corinthians. He is not using indirect speech, extra politeness, etc. He calls balls and strikes.
 2. He takes pride in them. He was confident that they would respond. Why? Not because they are perfect, but because God is so good and powerful, and He is at work in them. God is able to purify them and repair any relational damage and protect them from false teaching.
 3. Encouraged. Filled with comfort. He had been in a terrible state of unrest (see the next paragraph) but is much better now.
 4. Joy amid trials. The church there was a challenge, but it was not the only one Paul faced. But when the church did well, the other trials faded in importance and did not bother him so much.
- F. It is evident that Paul worked hard at keeping a troubled church from turning his feelings against them. He had feelings to be sure, as we will see next, but not against the people in Corinth—rather *for* them.

So, when we face correction, respond with an open heart. But also...

II. Recognize the Challenge to Your Mentor, v. 5-7

A. We will call Paul the “mentor” of the Corinthian believers. He is the corrector, the teacher, the advisor. He had written three letters to them (“O” Corinthians—see 1 Cor. 5:9; 1 Corinthians; and then the “severe letter”—see 2 Cor. 2:3-4). In them, he gave them some things to change in their belief, thinking, and behavior. But he felt that maybe the most recent dispatch was too much for them.

The point of this section is that his job is not easy. But he does it out of love to build up, not tear down. In a corrective interaction, the recipient needs to consider this and not just his own hurt feelings.

B. Paul experienced troubles on every side, fears inside, conflicts outside, and plain old depression. He was downcast, something like feeling an inability to cope with what was going on. This may not sound like Paul, but we have to remember that he was not a stoic, detached, unmoved person. He had normal human emotions and concerns over relationship and spiritual well-being. He was like Jesus who could weep over sin and death, and weep over Jerusalem’s rebellion, and be moved with compassion toward those in need. Paul experienced:

1. Fears inside, include not finding Titus at Troas (2:13). And then again, he did not find Titus in Macedonia, at least initially after he crossed the Aegean Sea and landed there. This made him even more upset. Titus could have encountered persecution, or could have been hurt in travel, or could have been detained at Corinth because they responded poorly and needed a lot more help and encouragement to do what is right.
2. Conflicts on the outside. Besides the issue of Corinth, Paul was facing daily persecution and even death threats. That was the normal state of Paul’s life.
3. Depression. Maybe Paul was fighting thoughts that the church was finished, or his ministry would be discredited, or Titus was dead. “Everything is lost!” “The sunshine will never return!” “The glass is not half full or half empty—there *is* no glass!”

True to life illustration: Suppose I have deep concern for someone who has fallen into sin. I have sent Pastor Jansen to speak to that person because we feel that will be the best approach to resolve whatever challenge is happening. But let us suppose that Jansen does not get back to me for many days, so I feel unrest. But I do not want to hound him about it, so I keep quiet. Finally, he comes to me with news. He is smiling. That is very good. He tells me the person has totally repented and is back on the right track. Three thumbs up!

C. God comforted Paul. How? Not through some vague “feeling” or mystical touch in his heart. Rather, God used:

1. The arrival of Titus. Just his presence was a boost to Paul’s spirit. He had traveled safely and was now back from his difficult mission.
2. The comfort that the Corinthians had given to Titus.
3. The news that the people’s spiritual condition had improved in Corinth. See the next point.

Refer to 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Paul is experiencing that himself.

III. React with Genuine Care and Repentance, v. 7

The recipient of Christian correction must not only **respond with an open heart** and **recognize the challenge that correction gives to their advisor** but also must **react with genuine care toward the person and repentance** over the sin that is at issue. What Paul heard from Titus was that the church had reacted very well with:

- A. Earnest desire or longing. Without knowing the exact situation, it is difficult to say with 100% certainty the exact nuance of what is going on, but likely a renewed affection for Paul and desire to see him after this episode of trouble between them.
- B. Mourning or sorrow. Under Paul’s influence, they realized that they had been wrong. Their poor behavior, perhaps including disloyalty to Paul and the gospel, temptation to follow some false “gospel peddlers” (2:17), and the toleration of sin in the church, required repentance. They mourned over their sin.

- C. Zeal or ardent concern. They were zealous for Paul and would now come to his defense if anyone tried to discredit him. They were earnest to get things right.
- D. All of this caused Paul even more relief and joy. They were now not defensive, offended, arrogantly dismissive, blaming others, or some other kind of proud response.

Conclusion

This passage reflects the ups and downs of someone whose job is to correct others, like an apostle, or pastor, or teacher, or coach, or counselor, or employer. There are times of discouragement, encouragement, pain, and depression. A true word of encouragement to such a person at the right time is a Godsend, especially after a challenging time.

Proverbs 13:12 says that hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life. We can see that from Paul's perspective in this passage.

Our focus in this section of Scripture has been that the recipient of correction must receive admonition well:

1. Respond with an open heart. Do not become offended at frank speech. Recognize the heart of love that correction comes from.
2. Recognize the challenge that correction is to your mentor and do not just think of yourself.
3. React with genuine care and repentance—mourn over sin and maintain an appreciation for the brother who gives you those corrective wounds. Those wounds may hurt, but they are faithful wounds (Prov. 27:6), health-giving wounds, loving, kind, maybe even life saving.

Let us ask God to help us be that way.

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