

# Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.  
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

## **Be Who You Are Becoming**

**February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

**2 Corinthians 7:1**

**Assistant Pastor Levi denBok**

### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 7:1. This morning we're going to focus in on one verse because it is a verse that demands application. In fact, this verse serves as a call to war for the Christian; a war against every vice and sin that keeps us from looking like Christ. Today's verse is a call to action.

I want to begin by helping you to see the context for this verse because it flows out of an argument that Paul has been developing for the last few chapters. There's no new content here. What we're looking at today is really the final appeal or the restatement of Paul's challenge to the Corinthians that he began back in verse 20 of chapter 5.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. **We implore** you on behalf of Christ, **be reconciled to God.** (2 Corinthians 5:20 ESV)

And Paul continues two verses later in 6:1,

Working together with him, then, **we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.** (2 Corinthians 6:1 ESV)

Paul is labouring with Christ to bring this church back into right relationship. He planted this church – he preached the gospel to them and they believed! Now he challenges them to be good

stewards of the grace that they have received. He continues in verse 14. We studied this together last week.

**Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.** For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? (2 Corinthians 6:14-16a ESV)

What the Corinthian church was missing was a singular devotion to Christ. So Paul is pointing out the lingering sin and he's calling for repentance. Repentance is more than recognizing that we have a sin problem. It's more than sorrow. Repentance is seeing our sin, being grieved by our sin and then turning and moving in the opposite direction. Repentance is letting go of sin and grabbing hold of Christ.

That's what Paul has been calling for. Turn from your sin and cling to Christ. In our text this morning he completes his call to repentance. The main thrust of today's text is action. Paul is calling for response. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

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 ESV)

Do you hear the terminology Paul is using here? "Let us cleanse ourselves... bringing holiness to completion." Who is called to do the cleansing here? Us! Who is called to bring holiness to completion? Us! Already I would imagine that there are some alarms going off in some of your minds. In your head you're asking, "But isn't GOD the one who changes us? Isn't it entirely HIS work in us?" To answer your question, yes... but. Yes, God is the One who enables us to grow. He changes our desires, He lifts our hands to take hold of Christ and He transforms us. Paul said that earlier in this very letter didn't he? Remember 2 Corinthians 3:18?

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are **being transformed** into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

So yes, God is the One who changes us. But, that's not what Paul is calling for in today's text. Is Paul confused? How can he write in his letter, "We are being transformed" and then in the same letter go on to write, "so let us cleanse ourselves?" We have two options. Either Paul is crazy so we should all leave now and go to Swiss Chalet, or both statements are true and equally important and we need to grapple with the text so as to understand. I think that second option is

the case here, so let's press in.

Before we begin studying and applying the text, I want to identify two ditches that we need to stay away from. There are two extremes on either side of the road and Paul wants us to steer clear from both of them. On one side of the road we see the ditch of legalism. As we study today's text a part of you might be inclined to think that we need to work really hard in order to earn God's favour. A part of you might want to compare your life with your neighbour's life and to pat yourself on the back for how good you've made yourself to be. If you find yourself there, you've gone too far. On the either side of the road is the "easy-believism" ditch. You might catch yourself saying, "Well, God doesn't care about my sin and addictions, and when He wants me to stop those things He'll do all the work for me." There are some of us this morning who are continuing to live in sin because we believe that we're powerless to leave it behind. And we believe that God is okay with that. Again, if you find yourself there you've gone too far. How do we stay in the centre? Our text this morning is going to be a great help toward that end. So let's see what Paul is saying.

### Analyzing The Text

We can break this verse into two parts – an indicative followed by an imperative. An indicative is a statement of what is, and an imperative is a command or a statement of what should be. This is not remarkably complicated, but it is so important that we understand why Paul has ordered things the way that he has in this text. For the sake of clarity, instead of using the terms "indicative" and "imperative", let's use the terms "identity" and "response". Paul is saying, "Because your identity is A your response must be B". Here's an analogy to help you understand. I am a father. There's the identity. Now, my son is the master of dirty diapers and, as his father, I feel a natural compulsion to help with the changing of said diapers. Because I am a father I change diapers. My identity fuels my response. So here's a question: If I never changed another diaper in my life would I still be a father? Yes! I'd be a lousy father, but still a father. The diaper changing doesn't make me a father, but being a father should make me into a changer of diapers. Because of who God has made us we are able and should desire to respond. This, by the way, is what separates Christianity from every other religion in the world. Did you know that? In every other religion the formula is reversed. Do this and you can be that. Do good and you can come back in the next life as a rich man. Obey and you can earn heaven. But in Christianity God says, "Before you did anything good I loved you, and I picked you up out of your self-focused,

rebellious, messy life, and I cleaned you off and I called you my own. Now, because of this new identity, obey.”

So, what is this new identity that Paul is pointing out in the text?

## **1. Our Identity**

Paul begins this verse by stating,

Since we have these promises

These promises, it would appear, bear some significance. If you weren't here last week than you might ask, “which promises?” If you were here than you know exactly what Paul is alluding to. I wont preach last week's sermon again, but we should reread these promises so that we can understand the flow of Paul's argument. Look with me at verses 16 to 18 of chapter six.

“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore go out from their midst,  
and be separate from them, says the Lord,  
and touch no unclean thing;  
then I will welcome you,

<sup>18</sup> and I will be a father to you,  
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,  
says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:16b-18 ESV)

Paul is pointing back to these Old Testament promises and he is claiming them as his own. How can he do this? He can do this because all of the promises in the Old Testament are fulfilled and owned by Jesus. Paul said this in 1:20.

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. (2 Corinthians 1:20a ESV)

Because the promises are fulfilled in Christ, and because Christ is in us, we can now claim these promises! So what are the promises and what do they say about who we are?

### **i) We are God's Temple**

This is hugely important. As you study your Bible you recognize that the temple is equated with God's presence. The temple was the place where God dwelt and where God revealed Himself to His people. But now, Paul says, God dwells in us. "I will make my dwelling among them and will walk among them." This is a game changer! Paul alluded to this in 1 Corinthians 3:16 when he said, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" He was speaking in this verse about the church as a whole. He was saying that God is physically present and active in the church. He was pointing this out because he wanted the church to see how awful it was that their gatherings were characterized by dissension, one-upsmanship and disorder. "How can you act this way when you gather together?? This is God's temple and His Spirit resides here!" But not only is God present in the gathered church but He is also present in every believer. In Galatians 4:6 we read, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, "Abba, Father.""" Do you see this Christian? God literally lives in you. As you go about your day He goes about it with you, and you have access to the presence of God that was not even available to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That's why Jesus said of John the Baptist in Matthew 11:11,

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. (Matthew 11:11 ESV)

What did he mean by this? What made John the Baptist greater than all of those who were born before him? He had *seen* Jesus! The prophets pointed forward to the one who would come but John actually saw Jesus face to face! Yet, Jesus goes on to say, the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John<sup>1</sup>. If you are here today and you've only been a Christian for a week, you are greater than the prophets and you are greater than John. Do you know why that is? They looked forward to Jesus, or in John's case, even saw Jesus face to face, but you know Jesus' resurrection and most importantly, the Spirit of God dwells in you. That's your first promise Christian; God is in you. Our second promise is this.

## ii) **We are Children of God**

Do you remember what Galatians 4:6 said? "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying, "Abba, Father!"" Not only is God in you, but His Spirit is actually

---

<sup>1</sup> Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: a Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 184-185.

crying out on your behalf. The Holy Spirit is essentially holding a neon sign over your head saying, “Father! This is your son! This is your daughter!” Try to understand for a moment how profound this promise is... People often complain about how unfair God is, but let’s just take a moment to consider the “fairness” of God. God would have been just and fair to leave you in your sin. Have you ever thought about that? It would have been fair for Him to give you over to your self-destructive ways and to allow you to suffer the consequences for the choices you were making. You were a rebel after all, and there is nothing unfair about letting a rebel pay for their rebellion. But God didn’t leave you in your rebellion did He? No, He stooped down to your level, he showed you the error of your ways, he showed you the weight of your sin and then he showed you your Savior in His Son Jesus Christ. On the cross we see the God of the universe paying the debt for our rebellion. That doesn’t seem very fair, does it? But that’s what God has done for you! And He didn’t leave it at that! That would have been enough, right? But he took you one step further and he said, “You are no longer a rebel. You are a daughter of the King. You can come to me whenever you please. I am interested and invested in your life.” We live in a world full of sinful fathers (Ps. I’m one of them...), but here we have the author of the universe, the only truly Good Father extending His arms to us. This is good news that we can’t keep to ourselves. God is adopting rebels into His family. So Paul says in Galatians 4:7,

So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:7 ESV)

You were a rebel, but now you’re going to inherit all that Christ has earned. That’s who you are Christian. Now, we mentioned earlier that our identity should fuel our response. That’s what Paul says in our text for this morning, and John says the same thing in 1 John 3:1-3.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3 ESV)

We are His children – temples of the living God – and when He appears we will be like Him. Everyone who has this hope purifies himself. Everyone who has this hope grows. Now that we know who we are in Christ we need to live differently.

## **2. Our Response**

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 ESV)

There is our imperative. This is how we are to respond. This is the call to war that Paul is issuing in the church. We are to war against our sin. We are to cleanse ourselves, bringing holiness to completion. Now, before we move forward I want to make sure that you understand the relationship between our identity and our response<sup>2</sup>. Going back to our earlier analogy, I am not a father *because* I change diapers. I don't lose my title as father if I fail to meet my daily quota. I am a father, and I respond by caring for my son in any way that I can.

In the same way, Paul says, you are God's temple. You are His child! So respond by growing in holiness. You're not a child of God *because* you are holy – you are holy *because* you are a child of God! There is no daily obedience quota that you need to meet lest you lose your status as God's temple and child. It is critical that you understand the difference. If you believe that your status before God depends on your works than you are in the legalism ditch. If you believe that your good works and your "holiness" have made you fit to be called a child of God than you are foolishly conceited because Isaiah 64:6 tells us that, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment." Even the best that you have to offer God is worthless compared to what He deserves. You're not a Christian because you are better or smarter than your neighbor! You're a Christian because God is merciful and He saved you before you did anything to earn it.

That being said, I suspect that the ditch we're going to be most inclined to stray towards today will be the ditch on the other side of the road. "Does God really care how I live? Do I really need to change?" Yes! Emphatically yes! I mentioned off the top that today's text would be heavy on application and now it's time for us to roll up our sleeves and to ask God what we can do. Essentially, what we're being called to do here is to "cleanse ourselves as we grow in holiness". We're going to do this by letting go of some things and by taking hold of some other things.

## 1. Let Go

Can you hear how the term, "cleanse ourselves" flows out of Paul's claim that we are God's temple? We see throughout the Old Testament that the temple is not a place for unholy things.

---

<sup>2</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle To The Corinthians* in *The New International Commentary On The New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 356. He states, "Imperative rests on indicative, "ought" upon "is."

Paul was writing to a people who were grappling with a number of temptations. They had false teachers who were putting forward a false gospel and they lived in a city where the predominant cult practice included prostitution, sexuality and mysticism. That doesn't sound so different from our day does it? False teachers are twisting and contorting scripture and their books are the number one sellers in Christian bookstores. The cult of our day is secular humanism or "self-worship" and one of its core doctrines is sexual promiscuity. Christians today are surrounded by temptations both outside of the church and within the church. Things that God detests are being celebrated all around us. But Paul tells us to have nothing to do with these things. He tells us to "cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit." He uses the terms "body" and "spirit" to emphasize that this is a whole life response. We need to cleanse our minds, our actions, our words and everything in between because we are temples of the living God and there is no place here for sin.

So let's make this extremely practical. Let's identify some things in our lives that we need to let go of if we're going to grow in holiness. Sin is a lot like a beehive. There it is, hanging in your life, but you don't even realize how dangerous it is until someone pokes it or attempts to unsettle it. But once you identify it and disturb it, the bees come out and the pain begins. This morning we're going to poke around, and we might just poke something in your life that you didn't realize was there. So what are some things that we need to let go of if we want to grow in holiness?

**i) Let Go of False Teaching**

Don't put up with false teaching anymore. Stop buying the bestsellers from the Christian bookstore that teach things that are contrary to scripture. If the book's title is "I Am" and yet the book is not about God's power but about *your* power and the power of *your* positive thinking than throw it away! Truly! We are responsible for the teaching that we subject ourselves to. We are going to be held accountable for all the air time we gave and all of the focus we afforded to teachers who told us to ignore the Bible. We have an appetite for new ideas. We have an appetite for authors who tell us that everyone else got it wrong. Recognize this morning that this appetite just might be what's holding you back from surrendering fully to God. The Corinthians loved their false teachers and they put up with it. Let that not be true of us. Let go of false teaching. Be discerning.



## **ii) Let Go of Sexual Immorality**

As you go about your week, remind yourself that you are a temple of the living God. I would imagine that it's hard to walk into a strip club when you know that God is in you. I'm also inclined to believe that there are very few people in this room who are battling with an addiction to the strip club. However, I wonder how many of us are allowing the strip club into our home? If you are here today and you are sinning with pornography than let today be the day that you experience victory. Enough is enough. Install filters, move the computer to the family room, get some accountability and stop dragging the Holy Spirit in front of that computer screen of filth. Stop. You might be thinking, "Glad that's not me!" Let's take a moment to assess the movies and the TV shows that we're allowing into our homes. Our culture worships sexuality, and the media fuels that worship. Consider the things that have been on your TV screen this week. When you stand before God, are you going to be ready to account for all of that? Let go of sexual immorality.

## **iii) Let Go of Quarrelling**

Does anything do more damage to our Christian witness than quarrelling? Do people at work know you as a gossip? Are you known for your uncanny ability to hold a grudge? You are effectively destroying your witness and defaming Christ and the church every time you open your mouth to slander your co-worker or your spouse. This sin is remarkably dangerous because it's one of the only sins that very few Christians are willing to correct you on. The sin of slander and gossip is a blind spot in the church today. Many of us are guiltier than we even realize. Let go of quarrelling.

## **iv) Let Go of Idolatry**

Ultimately, everything flows from idolatry. False teaching, sexual sin, quarrelling and everything in between all flow from our desire to dismiss God so that we can be gods unto ourselves and make our own rules. We often find ourselves worshiping at the idol of self, don't we? We want, nay, we *deserve* more leisure, more freedom, more money, more toys, more pleasure, more, more, and more. It's tax season. Are we ready to stand before God and to give an account for how we spent our money this year? Just as an exercise, look over your expenses for the year and

ask yourself who your tax lady would assume your god is. The God of the Bible commands us not to store up treasures on earth, and He commands us to care for the widows and the orphans so how much money can we spend on our toys and our leisure before we have stumbled into idolatry? Let's step back and assess. Ask the question, "God, does this please You?" Colossians 3:5 says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." That's your job Christian. Put it to death. Be ready to let some things go. After we let go we need to take hold.

## 2. Take Hold

This all feels very heavy. It is heavy. It's sin, and because Christ is in us we hate sin. And because we hate sin we find it alarming and concerning when we identify sin in ourselves. So we let go of sin and we take hold of the tools that God has given us for this fight. We hold onto the promises of God, we fix our eyes on Christ and we grow.

And we all, with unveiled face, **beholding the glory of the Lord**, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

It sounds as if seeing Jesus is what fuels our growth, doesn't it? In fact, we see the same thing in Hebrews 12:1-2.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **looking to Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV)

Do you hear that? We're running, we're casting off our sin, but the whole time we are fixing our eyes on Jesus who is the perfecter of our faith! Listen, some of us here today are feeling entirely defeated by this point in the sermon. I'm using the language "us" because that's the way Paul spoke when he challenged the Corinthians to cleanse themselves. Leading up to today's verse Paul was coming on strong with the "you" language. "We implore *you*" and "We appeal to *you*... Do not be unequally yoked". Paul was blunt. "*You* must change!" But here in his final push, as if coming alongside the church and putting his arm around them he says, "Since *we* have these promises, *beloved*, let *us* cleanse *ourselves*..." We can do this church. We're in this together. We're united in the promises that have been fulfilled in Christ and we **can** do this! So let's take hold of the tools that God has given us that serve to fix our eyes on who God is, who we are and

who we are becoming by his grace.

**i. Take Hold of His Word**

Read it. Memorize it. Love it. The Word of God is described as a sword because it is a weapon against the enemy. Every time you open your Bible to read at home, or you meditate on scripture in your mind, or you sit at a service and listen to it preached, you equip yourself for the war that is being waged for your heart. So knowing that Scripture gives us our ammunition for the fight, the next time the devil tells you that you aren't good enough for God you can tell him, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). And when he tells you that you're too weak to overcome the temptations that surround you just tell him, "No temptation has seized you except that which is common to man, and God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted He will provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 1:25). Jesus demonstrated how to overcome the devil when he was tempted in the desert. The Son of God didn't quote philosophers or self help books when he was tempted. He quoted the Bible. Take hold of God's word.

**ii. Take Hold of Prayer**

Pray! A prayerless life is a prideful life. John Piper recently said, "One of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from lack of time."<sup>3</sup> When we go about our lives without praying we effectively say to God, "I don't need You." Do you want to be an overcomer? Do you want victory over the sins that cling to you? Pray. Press into God. Ask Him for help. When the temptation comes knocking on your door, fall on your knees and pray. When that gossip slips off your tongue or you find yourself making an idol of your family, pray. Join a prayer group, keep a prayer journal, set aside a regular time slot in your day, do whatever it takes to become disciplined and regular in prayer. And lastly, as we let go of our sin we need to take hold of community.

**iii. Take Hold of Community**

You're not in it alone, Christian. In fact, you are surrounded by a crowd full of sinners who are

---

<sup>3</sup> Submitted via Twitter on Oct. 20, 2009.

being progressively made more and more like Christ. The person sitting next to you just might be struggling with the same sin that you're struggling with. In fact, the person sitting next to you might have already experienced victory over the sin you're struggling with! Find people who have fought this fight and won! Gather together on Sundays and sing with other brothers and sisters who are fighting the good fight. Get into a small group. Develop rich Christian friendships. Together we will fix our eyes on Christ, we'll be challenged by His Word and we'll grow. We'll grow in our love of God. We'll grow in our obedience. God, in His infinite wisdom, knew that you couldn't beat this on your own. So he put His Spirit in your heart and called you His temple and His child. He put His word in your hand and told you to put it in your heart. He gave you full access to approach Him at any time, with any request. And then He placed you in a community full of people just like yourself so that you could encourage them with your life and be encouraged by theirs. We are called to be a people who work with God as He works in us. We are called to be a people who are letting go of sin as we take hold of Christ. We're called to be Holy. So church, be who you are becoming. For His glory, and for our good. This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray.