

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

2 CORINTHIANS 7-9

There are expressions in our language that we use everyday, though their origins have long been forgotten.

For example... “Hang up the phone” - when was the last time you actually hung up a phone?... “You sound like a broken record” - what’s a record, let alone a broken one?... “Roll up the window” - how does that work in a push button world?... Or the term “clockwise” - digital displays are making that terminology obsolete...

And there are other such expressions, “running out of steam...” “hold your horses...” “put through the ringer...”

The phrases linger, but the concepts behind them, that were once a part of our lives, are no longer recognized.

And there’s another word that tragically I would have to put in this same category. It’s the term, “holiness.”

In the Christian church the phrase, “living a holy life,” was once a common expression, but today very few Christians even know what the word “holy” means.

Yet “holiness” is Paul’s theme at the end of 2 Corinthians 6, and again at the beginning of Chapter 7.

Verse 1 begins, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The word translated “holy” means “special to God.” Often, we think of “holiness” and “being holy” as an intrinsic quality. What’s “holy” is better or purer than what’s not. But that’s an incorrect use of the word.

In the OT the bowls and utensils used in the Temple were considered “holy” - not because they were made from unique metals, or because of a specific design.

Their construction could’ve been the same as any other vessel, but what made them special was their dedication to the Lord’s service. It was their consecration not composition that made them “holy.”

Once there was a mom who thought her household rules would carry more weight if they were written like OT laws. Surely her kids would obey biblical-sounding commandments. Here’s a sampling of her rules...

“Of the beasts of the field, and of the fish of the sea, and of all foods that are acceptable in my sight you may eat, but not in the living room.”

Of the hoofed animals, broiled or ground into burgers, you may eat, but not in the living room.

Of the cloven-hoofed animals, plain or with cheese, you may eat, but not in the living room.

Of the cereal grains, of the corn and of the wheat and of the oats, and of all the cereals that are of bright color you may eat, but not in the living room.

Of frozen dessert and of all frozen after-meal treats you may eat, but absolutely not in the living room.

Of the juices and other beverages, yes, even of those in sippy-cups, you may drink, but not in the living room. Neither may you carry such therein.

Indeed, when you reach the place where the living room carpet begins, of any food or beverage there you may not eat, neither may you drink. But if you are sick, and are lying down and watching something, then may you eat in the living room." Obviously, except for a few, very special occasions that living room is off-limits.

I'm sure this mom's living room is constructed out of the same materials as every other room in her house, but she's dedicated the living room as a special room for special functions - and therefore what's allowable in other rooms is NOT allowable in the living room.

And this is how you should understand "holiness." Your life is God's living room - you're the place where He continues His work, and lives out His life. And He's very picky about what happens in His living room!

A Christian is special to God - not because you're intrinsically better than anyone else, but you're His child - your life and all that you are is dedicated to Him.

Thus, anything that defaces the beauty or purity of your life, and tarnishes its witness, becomes off-limits!

Next Paul talks about holiness in the way that he carries out his ministry, "Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one." Can we say with Paul: "I've wronged no one, I've corrupted no one, I've cheated no one." Paul ministered for God with a clear conscience.

Though some of the Corinthians had been critical of him, Paul had been honest and straight-forward with them - no hidden agendas. Now Paul asks that they return the favor! He believes he's earned their respect.

Verse 3, "I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together." The church in Corinth doubted Paul, and it broke his heart, yet he still had a heart for them. He was willing to die for them or live for them.

He says, "Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf." Even as the Corinthians criticized Paul, he had bragged on them. They were a powerful church - filled with God's Spirit!

Paul continues in verse 4, "I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation. For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears." It's a bit sobering to hear the fearless Apostle Paul admit, "Inside were fears..."

At times even a courageous apostle gets fearful. It's been said, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the willingness to trust God in the midst of that fear."

"Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus..." I love the title Paul gives to God - "God, who comforts the downcast."

This word "downcast" was used by shepherds. Whenever a plump sheep fell on its back, and couldn't right itself on its own, it was referred to as "downcast."

Apparently, Paul was so distressed - "outside were conflicts, inside were fears" - he needed the help of his friend, Titus, to get back up again. Often, God uses the encouragement of a friend to get us back on our feet.

God comforted Paul by the coming of Titus. "And not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more." Paul was in Macedonia when Titus brought news of the Corinthians' reaction to his first letter, what we call 1 Corinthians. Though Paul rebuked them for their divisiveness and carnality, many of them had repented, and obeyed his instructions.

He says in verse 8, "For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it."

When I was a naughty kid my dad would lay me over his knee, pull off his belt, and whip my rear until it hurt. And he would always say, "Sandy, this hurts me more than it's going to hurt you." I never believed him...

Until I became a parent! Now I know it's true. And guess what I said to my kids whenever I had to spank them? Yep, "Son, this hurts me more than it hurts you." It's an agonizing ordeal to discipline someone you love.

This is how Paul felt when he wrote 1 Corinthians. Nobody likes it when their sin is exposed. A good rebuke hurts. Often it causes the recipient to get angry.

Paul knew the risks he was taking by reprimanding his friends, but he did it anyway. He wasn't worried about himself. He didn't need to be liked. Paul's only interest was the glory of God and health of the Church.

Hebrews 12 teaches us that a parent who refuses to discipline their child really doesn't love that child.

Paul loved the Corinthians enough to hold them accountable for their sin. **He was willing to risk his friendship with them to help salvage their fellowship with God.** Real friends do that. Love takes risks.

Paul continues, **“For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.”**

The Corinthians were sad for a season, but after the sting of the spanking subsided, the discipline worked. Paul's truth and love led them to repentance.

Verse 10, **“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”** Note, there're two types of sorrow over sin - **godly sorrow** and **worldly sorrow**.

It reminds me of the Catholic man tormented by a haunting secret. He worked at a lumberyard. One day he went to confession, and admitted to the priest he'd been stealing wood. The priest asked him how much...

He said, **"Enough to build me a house, my son a house, my two daughters houses, and a small cottage up at the lake."** The priest was shocked, **"My son, this is a serious offense, I'll have to think of a severe penance. Have you ever thought of doing a retreat?"**

The fellow got excited, **"No, but if you can get the plans, I can get the lumber!"** That's not godly sorrow!

Worldly sorrow is being sorry you got caught, or sorry you'll be punished. It tries to escape the consequences of the sin, and avoid the retribution.

It produces crocodile tears, but no real desire to change. **Worldly sorrow** is a self-centered sorrow. It's a self-pitying sadness - a **"woe is me"** kind of sorrow.

Whereas **“godly sorrow”** is God-directed and God-honoring. You're sorry you broke the heart of God, and thumbed your nose at His authority. You offended Him.

Godly sorrow accepts the consequences of my actions. It doesn't buck or resent proper punishment. It seeks not only forgiveness, but the opportunity and power to change. Godly sorrow yields real repentance.

Paul continues, **“For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved**

yourselves to be clear in this matter." If you want to discern if a person is truly repented use this checklist...

Is there a diligence to do the right thing - a desire to rebuild a reputation - a hatred of sin - a fear of God - a willingness to do whatever it takes to overcome - a passion for God - a longing to make things right.

Once a Sunday School teacher asked the kids, **"Who can tell me what you have to do to gain God's forgiveness?"** A boy answered, **"First, you've got to sin."** Sadly, I know some adults with the same attitude.

They sin to be forgiven, or they're forgiven so they can sin. There's no true repentance - no desire to break the cycle. Either they're enjoying sin, or crying for forgiveness, but there's no **"godly sorrow."** Do you really want to overcome what's dragging you down?

Understand without real repentance there can be no real forgiveness. This is what Esau discovered.

Hebrews 12:17 says of Esau, **"he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears."** A flood of tears is no substitute for a repentant heart.

Remember also Judas. Matthew 27:3 tells us, **"Then Judas... seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver."**

Judas was sorry he'd betrayed Jesus, but it was not a sorrow that caused him to face up to what he'd done. Rather than seek God's forgiveness and restoration, Judas sulked off in his sorrow and tried to avoid the consequences of his actions by committing suicide.

Verse 12, **"Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you."** Recall the original incident in Corinth that had provoked the church discipline. A man and his father's wife, his step-mom, were shacking up. It was blatant immorality. And the church took pride in their tolerance.

Paul said, **"No way. Either these people repent or you kick them out."** A church body can no more tolerate unrepentant sin than the human body can tolerate cancer. Leave it alone - ignore it - and it'll destroy you.

And the church had faithfully dealt with the situation.

Certainly, Paul confronted this couple out of love for them. But here he says that wasn't his only motivation. He loved the church, and made an example of this couple, to warn them of the dangers of compromise. He was looking out for the church's best interests.

“Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true.

And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.” The Corinthians lived up to Paul's confidence, with their “godly sorrow.”

Chapter 8... Once there was an infant playing on the carpet. She picked up a quarter, stuck it in her mouth, and swallowed it. The mother saw what had happened and went hysterical. She screamed to her husband, “Quick, call 9-1-1, my baby just swallowed a quarter.”

The husband responded, “Forget 9-1-1, call the pastor... he can get money out of anybody!”

In the next two chapters Pastor Paul's intent is to get money out of the Corinthians. He teaches on giving.

Famine had hit Judea. The region had fallen on hard times. Believers in Jerusalem were hungry and hurting.

And Paul saw their need as an opportunity to bridge the gap between Jewish and Gentile believers.

The Jerusalem church had sent out the first missionaries to reach Gentiles. Paul knows that now the Gentile churches can return the favor by showing their love for the Jews through their monetary support.

Paul had already collected an offering in Macedonia. He uses it as an example to inspire the Corinthians!

Verse 1, “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.” Notice, Paul doesn't call their monetary offering a gift, but a grace!

Receive God's spiritual favors, and you'll want to do something tangible in response. Giving is the answer.

It reminds me of the family that attended a church that took the offering just before they took communion.

The dad would give his kids a dime to put in the collection. One Sunday the youngest boy, who was new to the adult service, went to receive communion, when his

mom gently whispered, "Son, sit back down you're not ready to take communion yet." With a loud voice the boy protested, "Why not, I just paid for it!"

And sadly, that's how many Christians think it works.

God's salvation can't be purchased or earned. It's free. If your offering is an attempt to buy God's pardon, or blessing, or favor - then put your dirty money back in your wallet! **We don't give to get - we give to show our gratitude!** Giving is a response. God has been so good to us, our giving to Him is our way of saying thanks.

And apparently the Macedonian churches - Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea - were all grateful for God's grace. Even though times were tough they'd been generous.

The Greek phrase in verse 2 translated, **"deep poverty"** means **"rock-bottom destitution."** **"As poor as dirt."** It's graphic. It was used for a beggar with nothing going for him, and with no hope of improving his lot.

Yet though the Macedonians had very little they still gave generously. It just goes to show if you wait until you can afford to tithe to start - you'll never start!

As a matter of fact, statistics show that poor people are proportionately more generous than rich people.

In 2001 a study done by a group called **"Independent Sector"** showed that folks making under \$25,000 a year, gave away 4.2% of their income to charity. While \$75,000 a year wage earners gave just 2.7%.

It proves our willingness to give isn't as much about what's in our bank account, as it is what's in our heart.

The balance in your bank account might effect the amount you can give, but it should never effect your willingness to give, or the regularity of your giving.

Remember the widow's mite... What impressed Jesus wasn't the size of the woman's offering, but the amount that was left afterwards. She gave all that she had. She didn't just tip God. The lady gave sacrificially.

This is what impressed Paul about the Macedonians.

Verse 3, **"For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints."** The Macedonians weren't pressured or badgered into giving, they asked if they could give!

It blesses me when someone approaches us and asks, **"You guys don't pass the plate, so how do I give an offering around here?"** I think you're doing it right when folks have to ask how they can give an offering!

“And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.” Note, the priorities of the Macedonians. Before they gave money to God, they first gave themselves.

Too many folks try to buy God off with a few bucks.

They do enough to pacify their conscience. They give to get God off their back and leave them alone.

Here’s the problem... God could care less about your money until you give Him your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. He wants you - not your money.

Yet on the flip-side how can you say you’ve given all to God if you’re not even willing to give a tithe of 10%.

In Medieval times when armies were converted to Christianity many of the soldiers were baptized holding their right hand out of the water. It was a way of saying they were giving everything to the Lord - except their sword-hand - just in case they had to fight and kill.

Today, it seems people are baptized holding their wallet out of the water. They’re willing to give to Jesus every area of their lives - except their finances!

Verse 6, “So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well.” Paul had commissioned Titus to collect the offering.

“But as you abound in everything in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us - see that you abound in this grace also.” The church at Corinth abounded in the use of spiritual gifts. But so what if they spoke in tongues, and prophesied, and discerned spirits - if they were greedy and stingy.

On occasion you’ll find a Christian who excuses away his responsibility to give financially by saying, “Well, it’s just not my gift.” Paul disagrees. Giving is everyone’s gift. It’s our response to God’s grace. We’re all called by God to open up our hearts and our wallets.

Verse 8, “I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others.” His mention of the Macedonians was to stir up the Corinthians. But here’s another example...

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

If you won’t follow the Macedonian’s example - what about Jesus? Our Lord made Himself materially poor that we could be spiritually rich. Talk about giving!

“And in this I give advice: It is to your advantage not only to be doing what you began and were desiring to do a year ago; but now you also must complete the doing

of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have.”

Christianity and tennis are alike in that a good serve requires a good follow through! Good intentions aren't enough. Could'a, would'a, should'a - doesn't cut it. A year earlier the Corinthians started taking up this offering for the Jews in Judea, but had never finished.

It reminds me of the pastor's son who heard words at church like justification, sanctification, glorification, reconciliation - all these "ations..." One day his teacher asked, "Who can define the word 'procrastination?'"

The pastor's son answered, "I'm not sure what it means, but I know my church believes in it!" God wants us to obey... not just talk about it, or plan on it... but do it! Let's be an obedient, not procrastinating church.

Verse 12, "For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have..." In other words, don't get hung up on the amount of your offering.

What's important is "a willing mind" or sincerity. Give regularly and sacrificially and God will be pleased with whatever percentage or amount that turns out to be.

"For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality..." This is the genius behind the simple tithe or tenth. We all give a different amount, but the same percentage. Everybody learns the joys of giving, not just one wealthy benefactor. To God a meager tithe is as significant as a massive tithe.

Paul isn't expecting the Corinthians to give it all. He's collecting an offering from every Gentile church.

Here's God's wisdom in action... If everybody gives their share, then giving isn't a burden on anybody. So here's the question: Are you giving your share?

Once an ole country pastor needed to boost the church's revenues. He stood up just before the offering was taken and announced to his congregation...

"Before we pass the plate I just want to ask the person who stole Brother Harvey's chickens not give their offering. God doesn't want a thief's money."

Needless to say, for the first time in months everyone in the church chipped in, and donated their offering. And this is God's financial plan... Everybody chips in!

God is after an equality in our giving "that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack." Paul quotes Exodus 16:18. Sometimes I can give more

than you. At times you can give more than me.

But if we all give our share then it all balances out.

Verse 16, “But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you into the heart of Titus. For he not only accepted the exhortation, but being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord.

And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, (we're not sure who this brother was - perhaps Luke, maybe Timothy) and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us - providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”

“And we have sent with them our brother whom we have often proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, because of the great confidence which we have in you.” Whoever this praise-worthy brother was his job was to accompany the offering to Jerusalem with Paul. It was a security precaution.

If something happened along the way - the money was lost, or stolen, or it sunk in a shipwreck - Paul didn't want anyone accusing him of having absconded with the funds. Paul made himself accountable.

I like what Bible Commentator Charles Hodge writes here, “It was not enough for the Apostle to do right, he recognized the importance of appearing right... We are bound to act in such a way that not only God, who sees the heart and knows all things, may approve of our conduct, but also that men may be constrained to recognize our integrity.” Paul employed procedures that safeguarded his integrity... We've done the same!

Verse 23, “If anyone inquires about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker concerning you.

Or if our brethren are inquired about, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. Therefore show to them, and before the churches the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

Chapter 9, “Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous (i.e. unnecessary) for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority.” Paul was shrewd. In the previous chapter he uses the generosity of the Macedonians as an example to Corinth. But when he was in Macedonia he used the Corinthians' good intentions as an example to them.

“Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.

Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised...” Paul wants to avoid an embarrassing situation, and a poor witness. He doesn’t want to come to Corinth with Macedonians and there be no offering.

He’s been talking up the church at Corinth. Now he’s concerned about the Corinthians letting him down...

And he’s also concerned about the attitude behind their giving... “that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.”

Paul never asked anyone to give with a grudge. If after all God has done for you, if you have to force yourself to write the check... just keep your money. Give because you want to, not because you have to...

Verse 6, “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Your offering is like a seed. Plant or invest in God’s work, and it’ll yield spiritual rewards.

In reality none of us can give anything to God. He already owns all that we possess. Our giving is our opportunity to invest and participate in God’s purposes. It’s been said of money, “You can’t take it with you - but you can send it on ahead!” You can lay up treasure in heaven, by giving it to God’s work here on earth.

And verse 6 adds an important principle. The degree to which you give is the degree to which you get. Sow sparingly, reap sparingly - in other words, give a little, get a little. But sow bountifully, and you’ll reap bountifully - that means, give a lot, and you’ll get a lot.

Don’t forget, you reap in proportion to what you sow.

“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” Notice the three characteristics. Our giving to God needs to be personal, volitional, and cheerful.

A pastor should never lay a guilt trip on his people and put a dollar figure on their giving. A believer should give “as he purposes in his heart.” We’re under grace, not law. Be led by God’s Spirit in your giving.

A pastor should never pressure or manipulate folks to give, as if God needs their money or His purposes will fail if they don’t give. It’s true, they might miss out on a blessing, but God can supply whatever He needs.

And God wants us to be “a cheerful giver.” The phrase could literally be translated, “a hilarious giver.

God wants us to give with a smile. When a believer begins to understand how much God has given to them; then they’ll look for ways to give back to Him.

I’ve found that pastors tend to use three different approaches to raising money: the flint, the sponge, the honeycomb... A flint has to be struck to get a spark. Some pastors brow beat their people into giving.

A sponge has to be squeeze. Thus, other pastors use various gimmicks to pressure people into giving.

But a honeycomb oozes. Its inner sweetness oozes out. This is my approach. By helping you cultivate an inner appreciation of God’s grace, giving will overflow.

Verse 8, “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.”

God is all-sufficient, and if you trust Him He’ll be your sufficiency. He certainly can support His own work!

“As it is written (he quotes Psalm 112:9): “He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.” Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness (Paul prays for our harvest, but we sow the seed), while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God”

The Gentile’s offering will not only meet the needs of the Jews in Jerusalem, it’ll cause their hearts to rejoice.

God turns physical offerings into spiritual blessings.

This should be the motivation behind all our giving - not only to meet a physical need, but to glorify God...

Verse 13, “while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you.”

The Jewish believers in Jerusalem had prayed for the Gentile churches. Corinth’s offering was proof of their growth, and an answer to Jerusalem’s prayer..

Paul concludes Chapter 9, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! How fitting that Paul wraps up his discussion on our giving by reminding the Corinthians of the greatest gift... God's “indescribable gift” is Jesus!