

Comfort and Joy for a Caring Heart

2 Corinthians 7:2-4

Part One

When we exercised faith in Christ we became new creatures. **2 Corinthians 5:17** states this very clearly. **“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”** And this is the truth.

For if we are in Christ then we share the life of Christ, and if we share the life of Christ we will no longer be able to remain as we once were. We will over time become more and more like Him as we are transformed into His very image from glory to glory. This is what the Scriptures teach. And this is what we believe and hopefully this is what we are experiencing.

One of the areas that we should expect significant if not monumental transformation is in our concern for the spiritual welfare of others. Isn't this true? Just think about this for a moment. Is there anything that concerns Christ more than the spiritual welfare of others? And what is the answer? The answer has to be no! And why can we say this? It was Christ's concern for the spiritual welfare of others that caused Him to come into this world and to offer up His body as an atoning sacrifice for sin.

Therefore the spiritual welfare of others should be our growing concern as well if we truly are followers of Christ and if we are in fact growing in greater conformity to Him.

This will not only mean that we will, over time, find ourselves becoming more active in reaching out to others in order to meet their spiritual needs, but we will also find our emotions being tied more and more to how they respond.

If our attempts and the attempts of others to extend care are rejected we will find ourselves grieved and this will only intensify as we, over time, become more and more conformed to Christ and to the heart of Christ. But conversely, if our attempts and attempts of others to extend care are received we will find ourselves rejoicing and again this will only intensify as we, over time, become more and more conformed to Christ and to the heart of Christ.

And this is the truth. Listen to the words of Phillip Brooks, a 19th century pastor, and this is what he said. “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.”

Those who follow Christ will inevitably find their emotional state tied to the spiritual welfare of those whom they are seeking to serve, and this reality should become more and more our experience as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Hopefully this truth will come alive for us over the next several weeks as we once again return back to our study of **2 Corinthians**. And I would think that as this truth comes alive for us that God would use it to transform us and to open up our eyes to what it means to be a new creature in Christ. This is my hope for what we are about to study.

So now let us put what we are about to study in a context. As we have already seen, because of the controversy that had been raging in the Corinthian Church concerning Paul’s apostolic integrity, he felt compelled in **2 Corinthians 2:12-7:1** to defend the integrity of his apostleship to the whole of the church even though the majority of the church had already, in response to the so-called “severe letter,” repented of their bad attitude toward him.

But this will now change as we move on in our study to **2 Corinthians 7:2-9:15**. In this portion of Scripture, rather than addressing the whole of the church as Paul had been doing, he will now only be addressing his remarks to those who were presently reconciled to him within the church, or in other words to the majority of the church that had repented of having questioned his integrity and his message as a result of the slanderous charges of certain false teachers. It is this repentant group within the Corinthian church that Paul will now be addressing in **2 Corinthians 7:2-9:15**.

And if there is any doubt about this let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 7:8-9**. “**For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow,**

though only for a while—(9) I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance.” So to whom is Paul speaking as we move into this new section of Scripture? The repentant within Corinth!

And what will be the focus of Paul’s remarks to this specific group? The focus of Paul’s remarks to the repentant within the church of Corinth in 2 Corinthians 7:2-9:15 will be one of admonishment where he implores them to fulfill certain specific Christian responsibilities.

It is these specific admonishments that we will be examining over the next several months. So what were these specific admonishments? We will begin with the first one this morning.

Paul’s first admonishment given to the repentant in Corinth along with its accompanying commentary is found in 2 Corinthians 7:2-16.

So now let me read these verses for you. **“Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. (3) I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. (4) Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction. (5) For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. (6) But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; (7) and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more. (8) For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—(9) I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. (10) For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. (11) For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated**

yourselves to be innocent in the matter. (12) So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. (13) For this reason we have been comforted. And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. (14) For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth. (15) His affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. (16) I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you.”

So there we have it: Paul’s initial admonishment to the repentant within the church at Corinth along with his accompanying commentary.

This morning we will only begin our examination of these verses, but even so I believe these verses will hopefully be used by God to drive home the point that I stated earlier that those who are in Christ would inevitably find their emotional state tied to the spiritual welfare of those whom they are seeking to spiritually serve. In other words, when those whom we are seeking to spiritually serve respond to our ministry or the ministry of others we will be joyful, but when those whom we are seeking to spiritually serve do not respond to our ministry or the ministry of others we will become saddened.

So now let us break this passage of Scripture down into its various parts. In 2 Corinthians 7:2-3 we find Paul’s command to the repentant in Corinth to make room for him and his associates in their hearts. So now let me read these two verses and see if this is not so and what do these verses say? They say this, **“Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. (3) I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.”**

So there we have it: Paul’s command to the repentant. And what was his command to them? His command was for them to make room for him and his associates in their hearts?

But now we come to a very interesting question. How does this command to the repentant in **2 Corinthians 7:2-3** “**to make room for us in your hearts**” compare to the command to the whole of the church in **2 Corinthians 6:13** “**to open wide to us.**”

And what is the answer? Paul’s command to the repentant in 2 Corinthians 7:2 “to make room” and to the repentant in 2 Corinthians 6:13 “to open wide” are parallel commands, because both were intended to result in a separation from unbelievers.

But now let me ask you this question. Why would the repentant who are described as being filled with longing, zeal and obedience toward Paul in **2 Corinthians 7:4-16** even need to be given such a command in **2 Corinthians 7:2**? They needed to be given such a command for the simple reason that there were still false teachers in Corinth, and there was apparently still some degree of inter-connectedness between those false teachers and the church at Corinth and even some degree of inter-connectedness with the truly repentant.

But even having said this, there is a subtle difference between the command given to the church as a whole in **2 Corinthians 6:13** and the command given to only the repentant in **2 Corinthians 7:2**.

When Paul commanded the Corinthians as a whole to “open wide” to them in 2 Corinthians 6:11-13, he spoke to them “as to my children” in the hope that they would respond by separating.

However, when Paul gave the command to the repentant “to make room for us” in 2 Corinthians 7:2, he expected them to respond by separating, having proven themselves to be among God’s people by their repentance.

This is the reason I believe Paul’s vocabulary is different in **2 Corinthians 7:2** from **2 Corinthians 6:13**, or in other words “**open wide**” versus “**make room for us.**” And this difference in vocabulary I believe is significant.

While the command in 2 Corinthians 6:13 “to open wide” was a call to repentance to the church as a whole, 2 Corinthians 7:2 is aimed at those whose hearts are already “opened wide” but who were still in need of separation.

So hopefully we now understand this command just a little bit better. When Paul gave the command to the whole of the Corinthian church in **2 Corinthians 6:13** to “**open**” their hearts wide to him and his associates, he was hoping that they would in fact respond to this command by separating themselves from unbelievers. But when Paul gave the command to the repentant in **2 Corinthians 7:2** to “**make room,**” he was not hoping they would respond. He was expecting that they would respond to his command by separating themselves from unbelievers.

And is this any different than today? Not really. For three weeks I explained to the whole of this church from **2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1** the will of God concerning our relationship with unbelievers based on the words of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian church. And during those three weeks I was hopeful that every single professing believer in earshot of those messages would take them to heart, but truly the only ones among us that I truly expected to respond are the truly repentant, or in other words those individuals in our congregation who are actively striving not to lean on their own human understanding but to conform themselves in every possible to the clear teachings of God’s Word even though such conformity might prove itself costly.

So whom was Paul speaking to when he gave the command, “to make room for us in your heart?” He was not speaking to the whole of the church as he had been doing earlier, but only to the repentant in the church, those in whom he had a great deal of confidence.

So, what did Paul say to the repentant after he had given this command? Paul went on to support his command to the repentant with a threefold assertion in 2 Corinthians 7:2. And what was Paul’s threefold assertion? It was this: “... **we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one.**” So how does this threefold assertion support the command? The Corinthians should make room for Paul because it should be clear by now that he had wronged no one, corrupted no one and exploited no one.

These staccato-like statements serve as a summary of his response so far in this epistle to charges that had been leveled against him by the false teachers in Corinth. In essence by these staccato-like statements, Paul is reassuring the repentant that in every behavior he has been above reproach and has

given them no reason not to make room them in their hearts as he has just command them to do.

So as Paul expanded off his command to the repentant to make room for them in their hearts what did he say next? Let us now read **2 Corinthians 7:3**. And what did Paul say? **“I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.”**

So, what does Paul mean by this? We get a hint by Paul’s reversal of the normal order of life and death. So, what would be the significance of Paul reversing the normal word order? When Paul reversed the normal word order of “life and death,” he most likely alluded to the death and resurrection of Christ as being played out in his own life on behalf of the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 4:10-12).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 4:10-12** and see if this thought has not already been introduced in our text. **“Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (11) For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (12) So death works in us, but life in you.”**

Paul’s willingness to suffer for their sake expressed the depth of his love for them as fellow believers who share a common destiny. Far from condemning them, Paul, in giving this command to them to make room in his heart for them, is simply drawing out the implications of what it means for the Corinthians to be his “spiritual children.”

And thus, just as Paul’s suffering on the behalf of the Corinthians show his love for them, Paul is now in essence commanding the truly repentant within the church at Corinth to show their love for him by being willing to separate themselves from his opponents in Corinth.

So now where do we go as we continue to examine Paul’s words to the repentant in **2 Corinthians 7:2-16**. We considered Paul’s command to them in **2 Corinthians 7:2-3**. We will now consider what his disposition was toward the repentant in Corinth as he gave the command. And what was his disposition?

Paul, in giving his command to the repentant in 2 Corinthians 7:2-3, stated that in 2 Corinthians 7:4 his disposition toward them when giving the command was one of comfort and joy.

Paul had been fighting a huge battle with the false teachers in the Corinthian church for the hearts and minds of the professing believers who made up the church at Corinth. This battle had recently and dramatically turned in Paul's favor when the majority of the church had repented and opened their hearts up wide to him even though they apparently had not yet followed through in respect to their total and complete separation from the false teachers who had taken up residence in the Corinthian church, which led to the command that we just considered.

So, what was Paul's disposition when he gave this command to the repentant, to those that had responded to his ministry and had been reconciled back to him? Paul, in light of their repentance and his great confidence and boasting about them to others, was filled with comfort and overflowing with joy. Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 7:4** and see if this is not so. **“Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our afflictions.”**

This was Paul's disposition toward the repentant when he gave them this command, even in spite of all he and his associates had suffered on their behalf.

There are many different sources of comfort and joy in this life but let me make this perfectly clear to you. As we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus we will soon discover that there will be no greater source of comfort and joy in our life than seeing those that we have been personally concerned about and whom we have sought to minister growing and maturing in Christ.

May God give us the grace, even in the midst of all our afflictions, to find comfort and joy in the spiritual progress of others.