

Comfort and Joy for a Caring Heart

2 Corinthians 7:5-7

Part Two

When we commit ourselves to Christ and are joined to His life, we will invariably find ourselves, as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, being exposed to a new level of sadness that we had never experienced before. This new level of sadness is experienced when those whom we are seeking to spiritually serve are resistant and unresponsive to the gospel of Christ and the truths related to that gospel. It may be a mother, a father, a son, a daughter, or best friend that may be resistant, but whomever it may be, our response will invariably always be the same, one of deep sadness. In fact, the sadness can be so deep and so overwhelming that we can become discouraged and even depressed.

Do you believe this? You need to because this is the truth, and this is not an uncommon experience for those who are truly burdened like Christ for the souls of men.

But even in the midst of those times, no matter how fearful or anxious we might become and no matter how long those fears and anxieties might persist in regard to our concern for the spiritual welfare of others, we must retain a spirit of hope by reminding ourselves that we are not alone but that God is with us and desires to bless us as co-beneficiaries of Israel's new covenant promises.

Hopefully all that I have just shared with you will come alive for us this morning as we continue in our study of **2 Corinthians**.

We have recently transitioned in our study of **2 Corinthians** from Paul's apostolic defense addressed to the Corinthian Church as a whole in **2 Corinthians 2:12-7:1** to certain specific admonishments to the repentant within the church in **2 Corinthians 7:2- 9:15**.

And we are now considering the first of those admonishments. And what is the question that we are now seeking to answer in respect to the first of those admonishments? What were the basic components of Paul's first admonishment to the repentant within the Church of Corinth in 2

Corinthians 7:2-16? We found the first component in **2 Corinthians 7:2-3**. So, what was it?

The first component was Paul's command to make room for him and his associates in their hearts (2 Corinthians 7:2-3). So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 7:2-3** and see if this is not so. **“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, what was Paul's admonishment to the repentant? **“Make room for us in your hearts.”**

This was Paul's admonishment or command to the repentant. And as we discovered last week this admonishment, or in other words this command paralleled the command to the whole of the church in **2 Corinthians 6:13** **“to open wide their hearts.”** And why did we consider them parallel commands? We considered them parallel commands because they both required in Paul's mind a complete and total separation of the Corinthian believers from those within the church who were opposing him, whom he considered to be unbelievers, a separation that he believed should be the outflow of their relationship with him as a true apostle of Christ. This was the first component of Paul's admonishment or command to the repentant within the church at Corinth in **2 Corinthians 7:2-16**.

So, what was the second component? The second component was Paul's stated disposition of comfort and joy toward the repentant within Corinth when he gave the command for them to make room for them in their hearts (2 Corinthians 7:4).

So now let me 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 affliction.”** So, what was Paul's disposition toward the repentant within Corinth when he commanded them to make room for him and his associates in their hearts? Paul's disposition was one of great comfort and overflowing joy.

His disposition was one of great comfort and overflowing joy not only because he had recently been led to believe that those he was addressing were truly repentant, but also because he believed that they being truly

repentant and having heard his command to the whole of the church “**not be bound together with unbelievers**” in **2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1** and now having heard his command addressed to them specifically in **2 Corinthians 7:2-3** “**to make room for him and his associates in their hearts**” would in fact, once and for all, separate themselves from his opponents. It was this confidence, this expectation based on their repentance, that primarily produced his disposition of great comfort and overflowing joy when he gave the command for them to make room for them in their hearts in **2 Corinthians 7:4**.

So now having considered the first component of the admonishment in **2 Corinthians 7:2-3**, which was Paul’s command to the repentant to make room for them in their hearts and the second component in **2 Corinthians 7:4**, which was Paul’s disposition of comfort and joy when he gave them the command, we are now ready to consider the third component of Paul’s admonishment to the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 7:2-16**. So, what was this third component?

The third component of Paul’s admonishment is an explanation of how God through recent events had comforted Paul and filled him with overflowing joy (2 Corinthians 7:5-16). This morning we will be examining the first of those events. So, what was the first event?

The first event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy make was the coming of Titus while he was in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:5-7). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 7:5-7** and see if this is not so. “**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.**”

Clearly these verses communicate to us that God used the recent event of Titus coming to Paul in Macedonia to comfort him and to bring him joy. But why had the coming of Titus to Paul while in Macedonia produce in him such comfort and joy?

All we have to do in order to understand the significance of this reunion in Macedonia is to remind ourselves of what had led up to their separation.

It began while Paul was ministering in the church at Ephesus on his third missionary journey. While he was there in Ephesus he apparently heard a disturbing report about the growing influence of false teachers in Corinth. After hearing the report and fearing for the very survival of the church he made an emergency trip to Corinth.

And how well did this trip go according to **2 Corinthians 2:1-4**? This trip did not go well at all. It was a trip filled with much sorrow. And why was this? The church at Corinth did not respond to what Paul had to say. In fact, one individual in particular verbally attacked him while the church sat on their hands and did nothing.

So, what happened after this? After this visit Paul left Corinth and returned back to Ephesus where he tearfully wrote a letter to the Corinthians, that we presently do not have, that has become known as the “**severe letter**,” a letter in which he apparently told the Corinthians in extremely strong terms that he would not return to them “**in sorrow again**.” In other words, if they didn’t get their act together they would not see him again.

Paul then entrusted this letter to whom? He entrusted the letter to Titus and instructed him that after he had delivered the letter to the Corinthians that he was to come back and report to him how the Corinthians had received his letter. But Titus was not to meet Paul in Ephesus when he returned but in Troas where Paul planned to go after leaving Ephesus in order to minister the gospel and perhaps by the grace of God establish a church.

This is clear from **2 Corinthians 2:12-13**. So did Titus ever show up in Troas as planned? No! He never showed up. So, what did Paul do? Even though God had opened up a door for Paul to minister the gospel of Christ in Troas and was even able most likely to establish a church in Troas, Paul felt compelled out of his concern for the church in Corinth to leave Troas and the church he had established in a desperate attempt to intercept Titus in Macedonia, believing that Titus would pass through Macedonia in order to get to Troas. This was all shared with us in **2 Corinthians 2:12-13**. So did Paul want to see Titus and to hear from him his report? Absolutely! I don’t even know it is possible to put into words how desperately he wanted to

once again be united together with Titus and to hear from Titus how the Corinthian church had responded to his letter to them.

So now let us go back to **2 Corinthians 7:5-7** and look at these verses with this background in mind. We will begin with **verse 5**. **“For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.”**

So did anything improve for Paul when he arrived in Macedonia according to **verse 5**? Absolutely not! And how do we know this. Look at the very first few words, **“Even when we [in other words, Paul and Timothy and a few others] came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest.”**

Though Paul went to Macedonia to find Titus, all that he initially found while in Macedonia were afflictions on every side, conflicts without, and fears within (2 Corinthians 7:5).

You would think that after Paul went to such lengths to find Titus that he would catch a break. But he didn't. In fact, if anything, things appear to have gotten worse when he initially entered into Macedonia. What did he say they experienced after they entered into Macedonia? He said that they experienced afflictions on every side. This certainly didn't appear to be the case while he was in Troas. But it certainly did become the case after they entered into Macedonia.

If there is any doubt about this all we have to do is to read the verse. **“But we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.”**

The “conflicts without” that Paul referenced after he arrived in Macedonia are not spelled out for us, but certainly those conflicts could have been with people both inside and outside the Macedonian church. But even so the conflicts without were overshadowed in our text by Paul's reference to the **“fears within.”**

So, what is Paul talking about when he talks about these **“fears within?”** The source of his fears within had nothing to do with his own safety, since nothing would have been more out of character for one who counted his life, according to **Acts 20:24**, as not dear to himself and who looked forward to the time when he would be at home with the Lord according to **2**

Corinthians 5:8. So if the fears within had nothing to do with his personal safety, what was the source of these fears?

The “fears within” that Paul experienced while in Macedonia prior to the arrival of Titus concerned the welfare of his co-worker Titus and the spiritual state of the Corinthian church. Clearly these were the internal fears that Paul was wrestling with and which were beating him down and making him extremely weary.

But now we have some wonderful words in **2 Corinthians 7:6.** And what were those words? **“But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus.”**

Paul was deeply concerned for the welfare of Titus and the spiritual state of the Corinthian church, but God in the midst of those concerns comforted him by the coming of Titus (2 Corinthians 7:6).

Without warning, after all that time had passed, Titus showed up in Macedonia! What a rush that must have come over Paul! Titus was alive and safe. What an amazing thing it was for Paul to see him. Immediately upon seeing Titus, the heaviness that he had been feeling in his spirit must have immediately been lifted. He might have very well said to Titus, “Titus, what a sight you are for these weary old eyes! Why didn’t you come to Troas as we had agreed upon? Well, never mind you are here now! Praise to be to God!”

But now we have a question. What did Paul mean exactly by the expression **“but God, who comforts the depressed?”** The phrase “but God who comforts the depressed” is an allusion to Isaiah 49:13, which speaks of God’s future comfort of the downcast among His people under the future blessings of the new covenant.

So how should we understand Paul’s use of this phrase as Paul applied it to himself? Paul had been beaten down by the afflictions he was experiencing on every side: by the conflicts without and the fears within. But even though he had been beaten down, he saw in the coming of Titus the hand of God reaching out to him to bring him comfort as co-beneficiary of benefits and blessings of the New Covenant. In other words, though Paul was comforted by the coming of Titus, he saw the origin of that comfort as God, the one

who comforts the depressed or perhaps better said the one comforts the downcast.

This is how Paul viewed the coming of Titus and this is what led him to give God the glory. And this is exactly how we as co-beneficiaries of God's covenantal promises to Israel should also respond whenever we are in a downcast state are comforted by a certain event knowing that though the event may have caused us to be comforted the origin of that event was God.

But it was not just the coming of Titus that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with overflowing joy. There was something else.

As wonderful as Paul's joy was at Titus's return, it was exceeded by the news that Titus brought with him that he had been comforted by the Corinthians due to their positive re-embrace of Paul (2 Corinthians 7:7).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 7:7** and see if this is not so. **“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.”**

To remove any possible misunderstanding on the part of the Corinthians, Paul makes it plain that it was not simply the joy of reunion with his friend and co-worker Titus that had brought him such comfort and such great joy, as though his thoughts were for Titus and not for them, but rather the joy of discovering that Titus himself had been comforted and encouraged by them and had said as much when he reported back to Paul what had transpired. And where would Paul have seen this comfort and joy coming from?

The report of Titus of how he had been comforted and encouraged by the Corinthians positive re-embrace of Paul would have been seen by Paul as just another example of how God was using an event to comfort him in his downcast state in fulfillment of what He Himself had promised to Israel under covenantal blessings of the new covenant as indicated in Isaiah 49:13. So, what specifically did this report consist of?

The report that he gave described the Corinthians longing, their mourning, and their zeal on behalf of him who was their true apostle. Their longing doubtless denotes an earnest desire to see Paul again and to have the old

harmony and confidence restored between themselves and him; their mourning was connected to their new found awareness of the wrong and ignoble things they had themselves done or condoned in others and for the unworthy manner in which they had caused Paul so much grief; and their zeal spoke of their recaptured fervor and enthusiasm displayed in their conduct, which was the evidence of the genuineness of their repentance and of their determination not to be the occasion of further grief to the one who had so selflessly brought the gospel of Christ to them in Corinth.

When we commit ourselves to Christ and are joined to His life we will invariably find ourselves as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus being exposed to a new level of sadness that we had never experienced before. This new level of sadness is experienced when those whom we are seeking to spiritually serve are resistant and unresponsive to the gospel of Christ and the truths related to that gospel. It may be a mother, a father, a son, a daughter, or best friend that may be resistant, but whoever it may be our response will invariably always be the same, one of deep sadness. In fact, the sadness can be so deep and so overwhelming that we can become discouraged and even depressed.

But even in the midst of those times, no matter how fearful or anxious we might become and no matter how long those fears and anxieties might persist in regard to our concern for the spiritual welfare of others, we must retain a spirit of hope by reminding ourselves that we are not alone but that God is with us and desires to bless us as co-beneficiaries of Israel's new covenant promises.

May God give us the grace to know as those who have entered into the blessings of the new covenant, that even though we may become downcast, it is His desire to comfort us and fill us with joy.