

Comfort and Joy for a Caring Heart
2 Corinthians 7:8-13
Part Three

Being comforted, when we for whatever reason have been made sorrowful, can bring us a great deal of joy.

Consider for a moment what you might feel if it had been reported to you that one of your children had been killed and then in the midst of your darkest moment you learned that the report that you had received was not correct, but that your child was fine. What would you feel? I would imagine the first thing that we would feel would be an incredible sense of relief followed by an overwhelming sense of joy.

In this morning's text we will see this very same kind of extreme emotional swing from one of great despair to one of great comfort and joy; a swing that many in this room will be able to identify with but probably not all. So now let us go back to 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**. So, what are these specific admonishments?

The first of those admonishments is found in **2 Corinthians 7:2-7:16**, and it is this passage of Scripture that we are presently examining and the question that we are seeking to answer in respect to our examination of this passage. What were the basic components of Paul's first admonishment to the repentant within the church of Corinth in 2 Corinthians 7:2-16? So what was the first component?

The first component was Paul's command to the repentant in Corinth to make room for him and his associates in their hearts (2 Corinthians 7:2-3). So let me read for you **2 Corinthians 7:2-3** and see if this is not so. **"Make room for us in your hearts [there's the command, and here comes the extended commentary related to that command]; 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 the first component of Paul’s initial admonishment to the repentant within the church of Corinth? The first component consisted of a command to the repentant within the Corinthian church to make room for him and his associates in their hearts. And what was the specific intent of that command? The specific intent of that command was that the truly repentant within the church of Corinth would once and for all separate themselves from those who were opposing Paul. This was the first component. So, what was the second component of Paul’s initial admonishment to the repentant within the church of Corinth?

The second component was Paul’s stated disposition of comfort and joy toward the repentant within Corinth when he gave the command (2 Corinthians 7:4). So now let 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 when Paul gave the command to the repentant within Corinth to make room for him and his associates in their hearts, did he do so with a disposition of comfort and joy? Absolutely!

But where did this disposition of comfort and joy come from? Did it come from the stuff of this world: his comfortable surroundings, entrepreneurial successes, his growing popularity, his tight knit and loving biological family? No! His comfort and joy did not come from any of these things. So where did his comfort and joy come from?

The answer to that question led us two weeks ago to the third component of Paul’s initial admonishment to the repentant within the church of Corinth. So, what was the 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 joy (2 Corinthians 7:5-16). These events are detailed for us in **2 Corinthians 7:5-16**.

So, what kind of events were these? Were these events connected to his earthly comforts, his entrepreneurial successes, his growing popularity, or

his tight knit and loving biological family? And the answer is absolutely not! These events that God used to comfort him and to fill him with joy had nothing to do with him and his personal comforts or successes, but rather had everything to do with the personal well being and ongoing spiritual progress of others. And if there is any doubt about this let us go back and quickly consider the very first event that Paul provided the Corinthians to explain how God had comforted him and filled him with joy. So, what was the first event?

The first event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy was the coming of Titus with a good report concerning the Corinthians while Paul 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.”**

So, what was the first event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy? The first event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy was the coming of Titus with a good report concerning the Corinthians while Paul was in Macedonia, which had far more to do with the well-being of Titus and the spiritual progress of the Corinthians than it had to do with Paul and his personal comforts or worldly successes.

This was where we were two weeks ago in our study. But now we are ready to move on to the second event that Paul provided the Corinthians to explain how God had comforted him and filled him with joy. So, what was this second event?

The second event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy was the positive response of the Corinthians to the “severe letter” (2 Corinthians 7:8-13). So now let us now read **2 Corinthians 7:8-13** and see if this is not so. **“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.”

So did God use the positive response of the Corinthians to the “severe letter” to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy? Absolutely!

So now let us begin to examine these verses a little bit more carefully so that we might be better able to understand how God was able to use the Corinthians’ positive response to Paul’s letter to bring him the comfort and joy that He did.

So let us begin by reading **verse 8**. **“For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it [Do not regret what? Sending the letter]; though I did regret it—[Regret what? Regret sending the letter] for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while.”**

Clearly the letter that Paul is alluding to here in this verse is the severe letter written after his sorrowful visit to Corinthian church that he referenced in **2 Corinthians 2:1-4**.

So, what did Paul initially feel after having sent the severe letter according to **verse 8**? The verse tells us that he initially felt regret. And why was that?

He felt regret because he was uncertain how the Corinthians were going to respond to the letter he had sent and its very hard-hitting denunciation of their behaviors and their very poor treatment of him as an apostle of Christ. He hoped that they would respond well but he feared that they might not.

This uncertainty led Paul to question whether or not he should have ever sent the letter, not because it was wrong for him to have sent the letter, but rather because he did not know whether or not the letter would accomplish what he wanted or simply make matters worse. He just did not know! And it was that uncertainty that produced the initial regret that Paul referenced at the end of **verse 8** when he said, **“I did regret it.”** But whatever regret he may have had initially felt in respect to having sent the letter it quickly dissipated once Paul came to realize, through the good report of Titus, that the majority of the Corinthians in response to his letter had become sorrowful according to the will of God.

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 7:9** and see if this is not so. **“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 did Paul’s initial regret in having sent the letter quickly dissipate once he realized through the report of Titus that the majority of the Corinthians in response to his letter had become sorrowful according to the will of God? Yes, his regret quickly dissipated.

So, what did Paul mean when he referred to the Corinthians as being made sorrowful **“according to the will of God?”**

When Paul referred to the Corinthians as having been made sorrowful “according to the will of God,” he meant that they had experienced the kind of sorrow that God had intended. Not all sorrow is the same kind of sorrow for the simple reason that not all sorrow is the product of God’s grace working in the hearts of His children. But that was exactly the case here in **verse 9**, and that was exactly the reason why Paul was able to describe the sorrow of the Corinthians **“as being according to the will of God,”** because it was the very sorrow that God intended.

But how did Paul know this? How did Paul know that the sorrow that the Corinthians had experienced was the very sorrow that God had intended, or in other words was according to God’s will?

Paul knew that the sorrow that the Corinthians had experienced was according to the will of God because their sorrow had brought them to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9). Isn’t that exactly what **verse 9** said? Absolutely! So, what exactly is “repentance?”

Repentance includes both the remorse that comes from recognizing that one has wronged God and its consequent resolve to reverse one's behavior (Isaiah 66:1-2).

Let me read for you **Isaiah 66:1-2**. **“Thus says the Lord, ‘Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,’ declares the Lord. ‘But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.’”**

When God is at work in the heart of an individual who has sinned against Him to bring that individual back to Him, that individual through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit will inevitably become very contrite knowing that they have dishonored the Lord through their disobedience and will very much desire to bring themselves back into conformity with His Word.

And this is exactly what Paul saw in respect to the Corinthians and their positive response to his letter. Therefore Paul knew that God had used his letter, not to confirm the fact that they were pseudo Christians and would ultimately be condemned at the final judgment, but rather to confirm the fact that they were genuine and that God was at work in them and they would therefore not suffer loss in anything, including in the final judgment.

This was made clear at the end of **verse 9** when he explained to the Corinthians that they had been made sorrowful according to the will of God **“so that they might not suffer loss in anything through us.”** The kind of sorrow that we experience when we have sinned tells us a lot about our eternal destiny.

Professing believers who have been made sorrowful according to the will of God and have been brought to the point of repentance can be assured that their sorrow will lead to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10). Let me read the first part of **2 Corinthians 7:10** and see if this is not so. And what does it say? It says this, **“For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation.”**

But if the sorrow of professing believers is not according to the will of God and does not lead to repentance but is more like the sorrow of the world, it will only lead to death (2 Corinthians 7:10). And if there is any doubt about this let me read the latter half of **verse 10. “But the sorrow of the world produces death.”**

So, what is the sorrow of the world? The sorrow of the world is not present because of any remorse for sin they have committed in their rebellion against God, but rather because of the painful and unwelcome consequences of the sin.

The sorrow of the world and the sorrow according to the will of God both can be very bitter and intense but the difference between the two is one of repentance.

And that is exactly what Paul saw when Titus reported to him the Corinthians’ response to his letter. He saw repentance. And how did Paul see the Corinthians’ repentance expressing itself?

Paul provided the Corinthians with a sevenfold expression of their repentance in 2 Corinthians 7:11. Let me now read this verse for you. **“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.”**

Heading the list and the most significant expression of their repentance was the Corinthians’ renewed **“earnestness.”** What one desires is a sure sign of who one is and that they desired was to set things right.

The Corinthians’ other responses are all corollaries to this earnestness, including their indignation against the offender and against themselves for having supported him, their fear of God’s judgment and their zeal for Paul and his ministry.

And what was the consequence of this earnestness according to Paul at the end of **verse 11?** The consequence was that **“in everything you demonstrated yourself to be innocent in the matter.”**

In their past rebellion against Paul the Corinthians stood in danger of being condemned before God. But the majority of the Corinthians, in response to Paul's severe letter, had now demonstrated their "innocence"—not in their own strength, but rather through God's provision on their behalf, first in sending Christ to the cross and now in bringing them to repentance.

And then Paul says this in **verses 12-13**, **"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 why was that so important to Paul? It was important to Paul because their earnestness as an expression of the repentance would not only confirm to him that they were truly the children of God, but that their earnestness would also confirm to them that they were the children of God.

And what was the response to Paul to all of this? In **verse 9** he told us it was one of joy and in **verse 13** he told them it was one of comfort. Of course it was one of great comfort and joy in light of the fact that their earlier ongoing rebellion had raised the very real prospect that they were in fact spiritually dead and on the brink of eternal destruction, but in light of their recent repentance his confidence in them as being true believers had been reaffirmed producing in him that huge emotional swing that we had spoken of in our introduction since the ongoing rebellion of the Corinthians.

May God give us the grace when we sin to manifest the godly sorrow that will lead to repentance and confirm that we are the children of God.