

Comfort and Joy for a Caring Heart
2 Corinthians 7:13-16
Part Four

The joy of the world is entirely associated with the stuff of this world. In other words, the world is joyful when they are healthy. The world is joyful when they are financially secure. The world is joyful when their family is united and able to work together. These are the kind of things that make the world joyful and there is nothing wrong with that for these things truly are things that can make us joyful. But there is another kind of joy that has nothing to do with the stuff of this world.

It is a joy produced in us by God when we personally witness His mighty power, either in bringing people to salvation or in bringing people into greater conformity to His Son. This joy has nothing to do with the stuff of this world and therefore can be present even in the midst of our greatest afflictions, and not only can this kind of joy be present in the midst of our greatest afflictions, but this kind of joy can be so great that it is overflowing, or in other words it can become a joy that is uncontainable.

I know that for some people here this morning what I am saying has very little meaning. But this was not true of Paul. He not only understood it, he was experiencing it. So now let us go back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and see if this was not so. And where are we in respect to our study of this great epistle?

Paul in **2 Corinthians 7:2-9:15** is in the process of admonishing the repentant within the church at Corinth in two very specific ways. And we are now considering the first of those two admonishments. And what is the question we are presently seeking to answer?

What were the basic components of Paul's first admonishment to the repentant within the church of Corinth in 2 Corinthians 7:2-16? This is the question that we are now seeking to answer. And 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). We saw this command in **2 Corinthians 7:2-3**. And what did Paul mean by

this command? When Paul commanded the repentant in the Corinthian church to make room for him and his associates in their hearts, he was in essence calling the repentant who had now become reconciled to him to follow through on that reconciliation by once and for all separating themselves from his opponents within the church in Corinth. This was the first component of Paul's initial admonishment to the repentant within the church. 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 (2 Corinthians 7:4). We saw this stated disposition of comfort and joy in **2 Corinthians 7:4**. In other words, when Paul gave the command to the repentant in Corinth to make room for him and his associates in their hearts, he was not upset with them at all, in fact quite to the contrary. He was very happy with them, having been recently comforted and filled with joy by God because of them. And this led us to the third component of Paul's admonishment to the repentant within Corinth. So, what was this third component?

The third component of Paul's admonishment is an explanation of how God, through recent events involving the Corinthians, had comforted Paul and filled him with joy (2 Corinthians 7:5-16). The description of those recent events that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy are recorded in **2 Corinthians 7:5-16**, and this is the text that we are presently examining. And what we have been discovering is this: that each of these events that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy had nothing to do with the stuff of this world but rather the spiritual progress of others. 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). This event was described by Paul in **2 Corinthians 7:5-7**. And why had the coming of Titus with a good report comforted Paul and filled him with joy? First of all, the coming of Titus with a good report alleviated Paul's concern over the physical well being of Titus who had been gone from him longer than he had expected, but even more importantly Titus's good report greatly alleviated Paul's concern over the spiritual well being of the Corinthian church. So, what was the first event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy? The first event

was the coming of Titus with a good report concerning the spiritual well being of the Corinthians.

So, what was the 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). We saw this positive response in **2 Corinthians 7:8-13**. And what was their positive response? They had been made sorrowful according to the will of God, or in other words just as God had intended.

And how did Paul know this? How did Paul, based on the report of Titus, know that the Corinthians in response to the severe letter had been made sorrowful just had God had intended? He knew this because unlike the sorrow of the world, their sorrow had not turned them inward but rather it had turned them outward toward God. Or in other words, rather than feeling bad about what they had done simply because of how their sin had negatively affected them or even others around them, their sorrow came from the fact that they had dishonored God, shamed God by having rejected His apostle and the words of His apostle.

This realization of how they had dishonored God and shamed God, the one who had created them and had redeemed them through the precious blood of His Son, crushed them and produced within them godly sorrow, which of course brought them to the place of true repentance that Paul described for us very graphically in **2 Corinthians 7:11**. And what did Paul say in this verse? **“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 [or in other words in the matter of their sin].”**

This earnestness that they manifested in the matter of their sin is the same kind of earnestness that we need to manifest when we find ourselves in sin if we are in fact a true born again believer, for this is the earnestness that testifies to ourselves and others that we are the children of God.

So, what was the second event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy? It was the positive response of the Corinthians to the “severe letter” that manifested their spiritual progress and the fact that God was in

fact at work in them, not only to Paul but more importantly even to themselves.

So now we are ready to consider the third event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy. And what was that event? The third event that God used to comfort Paul and to fill him with joy was the joy of Titus (2 Corinthians 7:13-16). So let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 7:13-16** and see if this is not so.

But we will not begin with the very first phrase of **verse 13**, or in other words with the phrase, **“For this reason we have been comforted...”** for the simple reason that this particular phrase and the comfort that it speaks of is directly connected to **verses 8-12** rather than to **verses 13-16**.

So the passage that we will now read and that we will be considering this morning will begin with the second phrase and not the first. **“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.”**

This is the text we will be considering this morning. So did God use the joy of Titus to comfort Paul and fill him with joy based on these verses? Absolutely! So now let us look at these verses a little bit more carefully so that we might be able to better appreciate how God used the joy of Titus to increase the joy of Paul and his associates beyond what they had already experienced in the positive response of the Corinthians to the severe letter, and how overwhelming all of this joy was to them.

So now let us look at the second phrase of **verse 13**. **“And besides our comfort** [or in other words besides the comfort that Paul had just referenced at the beginning of verse 13 along with its accompanying joy: a joy and comfort that Paul and his associates had experienced based on the positive response to the severe letter as detailed by Paul in verses 8-12, Paul now goes to say], **we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus.”**

The joy of Titus as reported here by Paul in verse 13 not only added to his and his associates joy over the positive response of the Corinthians to his severe letter, but also added to it greatly.

What did Paul say? **“We rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus.”** In other words, we were really joyful over the response of the Corinthians, and if that were not enough we now have the additional joy that has come to us because of the joy of Titus.

So, what exactly was source of Titus’s joy, and why had his joy had such a positive impact on Paul and his associates? So let us continue on reading **verse 13** and Paul will tell us. **“And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.”** So, what the source of Titus’s joy that had such a positive impact on Paul and his associates?

The source of Titus’s joy was the refreshment that he had received from the Corinthian church or more specifically from the repentant within the church (2 Corinthians 7:13).

So now let me ask you a question. How did God use the Corinthians to bring refreshment to the spirit of Titus? I believe the answer to this question can be found in **verse 14**. So now let me read this verse for you. **“For if in anything I have boasted to him [in other words referring to Titus] 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.”** So how does Paul’s boasting to Titus on behalf of the Corinthians help us to better understand how God used the Corinthians to bring refreshment to the spirit of Titus? It has to do with the fact that Paul’s boasting to Titus on behalf of the Corinthians had not come out of thin air but had been precipitated by something. So, what might that something have been?

Titus, it would appear, based on 2 Corinthians 7:14, had some serious misgivings about his trip to the Corinthians, which led Paul to boast to him about the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:14). This is what I believe was happening in **verse 14**.

And to help this come alive a little bit more to you let me put forward a possible conversation that might have taken place between Paul and Titus

just prior to Titus's visit to Corinth and it would go something like this: "Titus, I have written a severe letter to the Corinthians denouncing their total disregard of my instructions to them concerning the incestuous man that has been fellowshiping among them over these past several years, and who has now shamefully become the mouthpiece of my opponents in Corinth and who felt the freedom on my last visit to verbally attack me publicly within the assembly. So would you take this letter and deliver it to the church for me?" And how might have Titus responded?

I believe this is how Titus might have responded. "Paul, you got to be kidding! There is no way that the Corinthians will positively respond to your letter or to me, your emissary. This letter and my visit will accomplish nothing." And what kind of response might this have generated in Paul. I believe that it might have gone something like this: "Titus, I know there is good reason for you to feel this way. But I am confident that the Corinthians, based on what I came to know of them when I first established the church, are truly born again, and if you deliver this letter, I am very hopeful they will respond, not certain, but I am very hopeful, for I believe in them in the Lord."

So now let me ask you this question. If this type of conversation actually had taken place, which I believe is very likely, would Paul have been encouraged by Titus's very cynical and pessimistic attitude toward the Corinthians if this was in fact the kind of conversation that had taken place between them? And the answer I would believe would have to be no!

And why is that? I believe that Paul would have seen Titus response to his request as a failure to love the Corinthians in the way that he himself believed that they should have been loved based on **1 Corinthians 13:7**, which describes love as bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things. And I believe this is actually what led to Paul's boasting on behalf of the Corinthians to Titus as recorded for us in **verse 14**.

So did Paul's boasting bring refreshment to Titus's spirit? No! But the Corinthians were able to do this very thing as we saw in **verse 13** and which is now explained to us in **verse 15**.

So now let me read **verse 15** and see is this is not so, that the spirit of Titus had been refreshed and that his spirit had been refreshed through the

Corinthians. So now let us now read the verse and see if these things are now so.

We, first of all look, at the fact that the spirit of Titus had been refreshed. So let now read for you the first half of the verse and what did Paul say? **“For his affection** [referring to the affection Titus since he returned to Macedonia] **abounds all the more toward you.”** Before Titus left for Corinth his affection for the Corinthians appears to have been in the process of being sorely tested. But after he went to Corinth and delivered the letter all of this dramatically changed. In fact, Paul told the Corinthian that his affection (referring to Titus since he returned to Macedonia) **“abounds all the more toward you,”** or in other words has never been greater. Clearly Titus, after visiting Corinth, had been refreshed by his visit to the Corinthians.

And what had turned everything around for Titus? It was what happened in Corinth when Titus visited the church, in other words rather than finding ongoing disobedience he found obedience and rather than disdain he found respect. This is what caused and was causing the affection of Titus to abound all the more toward the Corinthians. And Paul made this clear to the Corinthians in the latter of the verse when he said, **“As he [Titus] remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.”**

Titus expected that nothing positive would happen in Corinth as a result of Paul’s letter to them, in fact the only thing that he expected was that he, as Paul’s emissary, would be treated badly, but this is not what happened. Not only did they obey the instructions of Paul but they also treated Titus, the emissary of Paul, with **“fear and trembling.”**

The Pauline expression “fear and trembling” actually has its roots in Isaiah 19:16 and seems to reflect the anxiety over the duty required of a person. In other words, the Corinthians were falling all over themselves trying to make sure that they treated Titus, the emissary of Paul, with the honor and respect that they had failed to extend to Paul when he had come to them earlier on what has become known as his sorrowful visit.

So how did Titus respond to all of this according to **verse 13**? It filled him with joy knowing that God had done a mighty work within them. And how

did Paul respond to the joy of Titus over the spiritual progress of the Corinthians according to **verse 13**? It filled him with even much more joy than he already had. And why was this? It was because God through the Corinthians had brought refreshment to Titus, taking him from a place where he had very little or no confidence in the Corinthians and diminished affection to a much better place. And when Paul saw this mighty work of God, not only on behalf of the Corinthians but also on behalf of his beloved go-laborer, he could not contain his joy.

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Hopefully this is something that you are beginning to see more and more within your own life. Hopefully you are seeing that your joy is becoming more and more wrapped in the spiritual progress of others.

May God gives us the grace to rejoice in the spiritual progress of others, and may this joy dominate our lives more and more as we grow in Christ.