

## X. Titus to the Rescue!

February 3/4/5, 2015

2 Corinthians 7:2-16

**Aim:** To see how Paul's concerns for the Corinthians were turned to joy by God's grace in providing comfort through Titus.

### A. Joy in Paul's Relationships (2 Corinthians 7:2-4)

#### 1. Paul's Innocence (7:2)

<sup>2</sup>*Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.*

The opening plea of verse 2 simply puts the thought of 6:13 into different words. The translators rightly added the phrase 'in your hearts,' which does not appear in the Greek text, because it fit the context (cp. v. 3; 6:11, 13). Paul's heart is open to them; now let them open their hearts to him. The three statements of this verse, with their three verbs, 'wronged,' 'corrupted,' 'exploited,' probably take up words some at Corinth had used at some time, quite unjustly, about Paul. His conscience is clear, for the charges are groundless.

Once again Paul urges them to 'make room for us in your hearts,' or more literally, to be 'expansive' in their attitude to him. Without commenting on them in detail, Paul refutes three accusations currently being made against him, namely that he had wronged them, corrupted them, and exploited them. We do not know what the charges were, but they may have related to the collection of money for the believers in Jerusalem. Perhaps Paul is being charged with dishonesty and corruption in these matters.

Paul draws attention to the accusations made against him and his colleagues. News of the false charges had somehow reached him. Some Corinthians accused him and his companions of wrongdoing, corruption, and exploitation. If we know people are perhaps suspicious of us, or that they misunderstand our motives, it is often difficult to know what to do. One obviously good response is to persist in doing what is right, trusting that in the end the people concerned will recognize the truth about our motives. However, the situation may become so serious and unhelpful that it is better to make them aware that we know what they are saying and thinking. In the face of these accusations, Paul carefully reassures the Corinthians. He assures them that the charges were without foundation. They had not wronged, corrupted or exploited anyone.

'Wronged' is from *adikeō*, which means 'to treat unjustly,' or 'to injure.' Those who made this charge may have had in mind Paul's turning the incestuous man over to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5). But the apostle did not mistreat him but rather dealt properly with his sin. *Phtheirō* ('corrupted') refers to moral corruption (cp. 1 Cor. 15:33). *Pleonekteō* ('we took advantage of') refers to defrauding others by selfishly using them for gain. Specifically, it conveys the idea of manipulating people for financial gain (cp. 12:17-18). Neither Paul nor anyone associated with him took advantage of the Corinthians financially, despite the repeated accusations by the false teachers. In fact, the opposite was true. Rather than using the Corinthians for personal gain, Paul humbly, sacrificially endured suffering and hardship for them.

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### 2. Paul's Concern (7:3)

<sup>3</sup>*I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.*

Paul did not want the Corinthians to interpret his strong defense of his integrity in verse 2 (or elsewhere) as an attack on them. *Katakrisis* ('condemn') refers to passing final judgment. Paul was not passing a final verdict on them; he was not giving up on them. He was not angry; he was not consigning them to final judgment. He did not want to sever his relationship with them, but restore it. Therefore he rebuked their sin and rebellion and called for them to repent and reaffirm their loyalty to him. Paul's declaration 'you are in our hearts' repeats his thought from 6:11. The phrase 'to die together and to live together' reflects Paul's undying loyalty to the Corinthians. Further, their relationship will transcend death and last forever in the glory of heavenly life.

At this point in the letter, he is concerned lest they think he is trying to get his own back by leveling charges against them. The accusations against him must have come from a small group and never been shared by the majority, although perhaps these charges may have made some others rather inhibited in their dealings with him just in case they proved to be true. That is the sad thing about false charges.

The Corinthians might have interpreted such a direct answer as a rebuke. To counter this possible misinterpretation, Paul explains that he had no desire to condemn them because of the wrong things that had been said. His relations with the Corinthians had been going through some difficulties of late, but this had not altered Paul's love for them, which he believed to be deep enough to enable him not only to share life with them but also, if need be, death as well.

Nevertheless, he does not write this to condemn the Corinthians. If they are saying these things it will be due to the evil slander of other people. Indeed, he sees his future and theirs as being closely connected in relation to death and life. As believers together they share a common destiny.

### 3. Paul's Joy (7:4)

<sup>4</sup>*I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.*

'Great is my confidence in you.' At first glance, this is an astonishing, even shocking, statement. The Corinthian church was the most trouble-plagued of any New Testament church. Yet Paul was open and bold, freely speaking (*parrēsia*, 'confidence,' can also be translated 'freedom of speech') of the work of the Lord in that assembly. Certainly, then, Paul's great trust and confidence in the Corinthians was not based on their track record. Despite their unfaithfulness, disloyalty, and sin, Paul maintained his confidence in the Corinthians—not because of them, but because he knew that God would complete the saving work He had begun in them (cp. Phil. 1:6).

That Paul would engage in 'boasting on behalf' of a church filled with immaturity, disloyalty, doubt, and disaffection is amazing. Though *kauchēsis* ('boasting') can have the negative connotation of pride (e.g., Rom. 3:27; James 4:16), it more often has the positive connotation of praise, as it does here.

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Even more surprising than Paul's trust in and praise for the Corinthians was that they brought him joy. Despite all the problems they caused him, Paul used a perfect passive indicative verb to say that he had been and still was 'filled with comfort.' No amount of affliction could stem the overflowing joy he felt.

Verse 4 is one of the strongest positive statements Paul makes about the Corinthian Christians in his extant correspondence. This verse looks forward to what he will soon say about Titus and the news this friend of his brought back from Corinth. The apostle had been facing troubles, but the news brought by Titus had made his heart leap for joy. 'So,' Paul must have thought, 'my work there has not been in vain after all!' We all need to be realistic about troubles in a local church and not attempt to deny their existence or sweep them under the carpet, but we should also keep a sense of proportion and rejoice at God's work in the hearts of His people.

Evidently, despite the problems, Paul remains both optimistic and confident of his relationships with them. Here we have an insight into the remarkable resilience and perseverance of the apostle Paul, which doubtless he would quickly attribute, as we also should, to the grace of God and the power of the Spirit.

Paul deliberately affirms his great confidence, pride, encouragement, and joy in his readers. When things go wrong in relationships, one positive way to rebuild them is to affirm the good things we see in one another.

### **B. Joy in Titus's Return (2 Corinthians 7:5-7)**

Prior to his 'long digression' about the ministry of the new covenant (2:14-7:4), Paul had appealed to the Corinthians to 'forgive and comfort' an offending member. Writing from Macedonia, Paul takes up the thread of his travel narrative that had been broken in Troas (2:12-13). He explains how relieved and thankful he had been to have finally heard of the Corinthians' support of him in their attitude to the offender.

It is evident that Paul's 'Great Digression,' which commenced at 2:14, comes to its conclusion at the end of 7:4, for in the next verse he takes up again the subject of the return of Titus to him from Macedonia. Paul had been preaching the gospel in Troas during his third missionary journey (2:12-13), but he was also eagerly awaiting the arrival of Titus from Corinth and could not rest because the coming of his friend was somewhat delayed. Even after he had got nearer Corinth by going over into Macedonia, the situation had not improved.

The church in which he had invested nearly two years of his life had repaid him with disloyalty. They had allowed false teachers to come into their assembly and attack Paul's character and ministry. Even worse, some of the Corinthians believed their lies and joined in a mutiny against him. One of them had apparently verbally assaulted and abused Paul (cp. 2:5-8, 10) during the apostle's painful, sorrowful, visit to Corinth. That the majority in the church had not defended him from those attacks wounded Paul deeply. The visit was so discouraging that he did not want to return to Corinth and expose himself to more pain (2:1). As a result of the visit, he had written a sternly worded letter, rebuking the Corinthians for their disaffection, disloyalty, and lack of love toward him. Writing that letter was extremely painful for Paul (2:4). Paul sent the letter to Corinth with Titus, his beloved son in the faith (Titus 1:4), who was also to bring the Corinthians' response back to him. The apostle left Ephesus (where he had written the severe letter) and went to Troas (a seaport on the west coast of Asia Minor), where he hoped to rendezvous with Titus. But Paul was so anxious about the situation in Corinth that he could not

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minister in Troas (2:13), even though the Lord opened a door for him there (2:12). Restless, unable to wait any longer, the apostle set off for Macedonia, anxious to meet Titus sooner and find out the Corinthians' response to the severe letter. At that point (2:13), the narrative broke off, and Paul entered into a prolonged digression about his ministry (2:14-7:4). Here, in 7:5, the apostle returned to the events that followed the sending of the severe letter.

### 1. Paul's Condition (7:5)

<sup>5</sup>*For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within.*

Since sea travel had to be suspended for the winter months, we infer that Titus' non-arrival in Troas by late autumn left Paul with no alternative but to sail (on the last ship?) for Macedonia. Of the three known churches in Macedonia – Berea, Thessalonica, Philippi – the latter is the most likely alternative rendezvous to have been previously agreed on by Paul and Titus. Paul may indeed have spent some time there awaiting the arrival of Titus and then writing this lengthy letter.

When he arrived in Macedonia, nothing changed; he had no relief from his concern over the situation at Corinth. In fact, he had new concerns. What if the severe letter had made things worse? Was the breach with the Corinthians now irreparable? How would they treat Titus?

The time of waiting for Titus in Macedonia was one of suffering for Paul and his companions. His words 'this body (literally, 'flesh') of ours had no rest' mean that sleep was denied them. Because of their ministry in the gospel, they were subjected to intense pressure. They experienced 'conflicts on the outside' (Jewish or pagan persecution?) and 'fears within' (worry about Titus's safety?). The deep distress which led Paul to leave Troas was in no way relieved by his arrival in northern Greece.

In 2:13 he had written that he had no peace of mind, while here he says he had no rest of body. This change of language can hardly imply a contrast; mental concern can often sow itself in physical restlessness. In life, pressures may come either from outside, from circumstances, from our contact with others, or from within, from our own fears and anxieties. Paul was not immune to either, and he had evidently had an unpleasant time in Macedonia. He does not say what the conflicts were. It is unlikely that he had difficult confrontations with one or more of the Macedonian churches, for he writes so warmly about them in chapters 8 and 9. It is more probable that these conflicts were due to opposition to his evangelistic teaching.

In Macedonia Paul suffered exhaustion due to constant affliction as he was pressured externally and internally. The 'fighting[s] without' refer to heated disputes with either believers or unbelievers, and likely both. The word 'fightings' (*machai*) applies only to quarrels and disputes, so Paul's 'fightings' may have been heated disputations with either unbelievers (cp. Acts 17:5-14) or Christian opponents (cp. Phil. 3:2) in Macedonia). He was immersed in a maelstrom of quarreling. Paul could not escape. Every turn brought him face to face with conflict.

*Machē* ('conflicts') literally means 'fights' or 'strife' and appears to be the source of the word *machaira* ('sword'). It describes serious quarrels (2 Tim. 2:23), disputes (Titus 3:9), and conflicts (James 4:1). It likely refers to those in Macedonia who wanted to get rid of Paul. *Phobos* ('fears'), the source of the English word 'phobia,' describes Paul's intense anxiety over the situation of the church at Corinth.

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Along with this, he experienced ‘fear[s] within.’ These were not fears for his own life. His inner fears were about what might happen to his work, for he often spoke about this (e.g., Gal. 4:11; 1 Th. 3:5; 2 Cor. 11:28-29). These ministerial fears weighed heavily on Paul. He was always fearful for some troubled soul in one of the churches who was falling away.

The reason Paul was sorrowing and downcast was his other-directed love, here to Titus and to the church in Corinth. All his present fears and all his present fightings were grounded in his concern for others. This other-directedness was the basis of his depression and also, as we shall see, the springboard for his comfort and joy.

### 2. Titus’s Coming (7:6)

*‘But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus...’*

The external and internal pressures he faced troubled him to the point that he became ‘depressed.’ *Tapeinos* (‘depressed’) refers to those who are downcast, downhearted, and down-and-out, whose very condition elicits compassion (cp. Rom 12:16).

The word translated ‘downcast’ means any kind of lowliness, whether this be physical or whether it be lowliness of status or of emotion or attitude, and so it is used of Christ’s attitude and translated ‘meekness’ in 10:1. In context here, it seems clear that Paul is referring to emotional depression, and hence ‘downcast’ is an appropriate translation.

The narrative does not end with Paul being depressed. This is a passage about joy, not depression. In fact, comfort is mentioned six times in these verses and joy or rejoicing five times. The ‘coming of Titus’ brought the joy to Paul’s heart. The apostle rejoiced that he was safe and in the renewal of their fellowship.

The divine antidote to Paul’s depression was the coming of Titus, the so-called ‘Titus Touch’ (Hughes). Without warning, Titus showed up! What a rush came over Paul. Titus was alive and safe. Always the theologian, Paul puts Titus’s coming in theological perspective with his opening words: ‘But God...’ God had come through Titus’s arrival. For in the coming of Titus, God visited Paul.

Paul does not tell us where he was when Titus returned to him, although we assume he was still in Macedonia. The coming of Titus was a great source of comfort to Paul. Perhaps he had been anxious about his actual physical safety.

The despair of verse 5 is contrasted with the relief and thankfulness expressed in verses 6 and 7, commencing as they do with the words, ‘But God.’ In referring to ‘God, who comforts,’ Paul now echoes phrases he used at the beginning of the letter (1:3-7). God had comforted Paul in Macedonia! The God of the Bible, of yesterday, is the God of today, powerful and active to comfort His people.

The truth of this is substantiated by Paul’s phrase, ‘God, who comforts the downcast,’ an allusion to Isaiah 49:13 (LXX), which speaks of God having ‘comforted the downcast of His people.’ Thus Paul saw his own relief at the coming of Titus as evidence of God’s comfort of His people in the end-time. ‘God, who comforts the downcast’ speaks of God’s grace to His people under the new covenant. This is what God does for His people. And in this manner, Paul teaches us how we ought to view the comforts that come our way.

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### 3. Titus's Comfort (7:7)

<sup>7</sup>*...and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.*

God brought His comfort to Paul in a twofold manner. There was first, the eventual arrival of Titus, thus removing fears that thieves had struck him down. (Possibly Paul had expected Titus to bring the collection with him, thus making him an attractive target for attack.) Further, to his immense relief, Titus brought an enthusiastic report of the positive Corinthian response to the 'sorrowful letter.'

As wonderful as Paul's joy was at Titus's return, it was exceeded by the news of Titus having been comforted by the Corinthians due to their positive re-embrace of Paul. We can imagine how Paul and those with him were encouraged when Titus reported, 'The Corinthians love you. They remember you with great affection. They care about you.'

The report Titus brought to Paul was good. He had evidently been warmly received by the Corinthian believers, and he had been encouraged by finding the general situation at the church much improved. This must have been a means of great encouragement for the apostle. He uses three phrases to describe the nature of the good news Titus had brought. First, there was 'your longing for me.' They may have complained about his earlier non-appearance (1:15-17), but for the most of them this was because they genuinely desired fellowship with him. The reference to 'your deep sorrow' points to the genuineness of the church's repentance for any disloyalty some of its members had shown to him. The spiritual temperature of many a church today would improve greatly if brothers and sisters in Christ were only more ready to apologize. The adjective Paul uses in the phrase, 'your ardent concern for me' suggests intensiveness, zeal, passion. It perhaps underlines the fact that they were now deeply troubled at the pain they had apparently caused him.

Titus shared Paul's concern over the Corinthians' defection and no doubt viewed his mission to Corinth with some anxiety, not knowing what to expect. But the Corinthians had brought him comfort and joy by their repentant attitude. They had responded properly to the severe letter. Specifically, Titus reported three characteristics of the Corinthians' response that revealed their loyalty to Paul. The Corinthians' response to the severe letter was not one of grudging acceptance of Paul's apostolic authority. Instead, it was one of 'longing' and yearning to see him and have their relationship with him restored. Realizing that their sin had caused him pain and sorrow the Corinthians also responded by 'mourning.' They grieved over the breach in their relationship with Paul and deeply regretted their disloyalty to him. Finally, they expressed 'zeal,' both to restore their relationship with the apostle and to defend him against further attacks.

It would appear that Titus was the bearer of both good and bad news. On the one hand, he told Paul that the disciplinary matter had been resolved satisfactorily, and that, while the Corinthians' support of the collection was disappointing, it could perhaps still be retrieved. On the other hand, however, Titus would have informed the apostle of the strengthening grip of the Judaizers on the Corinthian church and of the increasingly personal attacks that were being directed at Paul. There were still unresolved problems (which Paul addressed in chapters 10-13). But the majority of the Corinthian believers had repented and reaffirmed their loyalty to the apostle and the truth he taught, which brought him immense relief.

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The other-directedness of Paul's life shines here. Initially he was downcast not for himself but for the uncertain fate of Titus and the looming apostasy of the Corinthians. But now his joy surges at Titus's comfort at the Corinthian turnaround evidence in their longing and mourning and zeal for Paul, so that he 'rejoiced still more.' Again Paul has emphasized that the source of all this comfort is God alone. And Paul has received it fully because he is so God-focused and other-person focused.

### C. Joy in the Corinthians' Repentance (2 Corinthians 7:8-13a)

#### 1. Godly Grief (7:8-10)

##### a) Paul's Regret (7:8)

<sup>8</sup>*For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while.*

Paul now reveals what he had previously hinted at. The reason for his upset state at Troas and Macedonia had been deep concern at the effects of the (now lost) letter to the Corinthians (2:1-4, 13). He now discloses 'regret' at the severity of the letter. As their apostle, Paul felt a fatherly love towards his children in the gospel.

At times a father has to deal severely with his children, disciplining them for their own good. A good father never enjoys this, but he does it. In the same way, Paul's penning the severe letter to the Corinthians, his second epistle to them, was a distasteful but necessary task (cp. 2:4). The object of that letter was to bring about grief and repentance among the Corinthians.

Paul's letter was an exercise of pastoral discipline. Discipline is never pleasant at the time, but properly exercised and received, it produces fruit. That is why it is foolish to neglect the practice of discipline. It is easy to shirk it because it is hard to administer if we are sensitive and caring. However, if we genuinely care for people, like parents caring for their children, we must take it on board because love demands it.

Paul's previous letter to them had evidently upset its recipients. It is most interesting to see the inner conflict, the oscillation of emotions, that this caused for Paul himself. When he first heard of their reaction, apparently, he regretted having written to them in this vein. This again shows how very human he was. None of us likes the thought that we have caused sorrow to people we love and the great apostle was no exception in feeling this way.

Paul did experience temporary remorse over writing that letter. While he anxiously waited for Titus to return with the Corinthians' response, the apostle worried that the letter might have only made things worse. The Greek text for 'only for a while' reads 'for an hour,' a metaphor for a brief period of time. His regret vanished when he saw the results of the sorrow.

##### b) Corinthian's Repentance (7:9-10)

##### (1) Repentance (7:9a)

<sup>9</sup>*As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting.*

The instrument God employed to bring the Corinthians to repentance was Paul's letter. His letter—unpleasant as they found it at first—stirred them to right action. Their distress turned

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them to God rather than away. Repentance has three main ingredients: contrition, confession, and conversion. It brings benefit, and never loss.

Their sorrow led to ‘repentance’ (*metanoia*; a change of heart and life; a turning from sin to holiness), which produced genuine change. They were not defensive; they did not view themselves as victims or seek to justify their sinful behavior.

Paul writes about ‘repentance’ and then goes on to give a most helpful description of it, in so doing distinguishing it from mere remorse. The Greek word *metanoia*, ‘repentance’ (v. 9), means literally ‘a change of mind,’ and it is used in the New Testament of that radical change of outlook, especially about our personal sin, that comes in the course of a saving encounter with Christ. Like every evidence of a true conversion, of course, it is the product of the gracious work of God’s Spirit in the hearts of men and women. Genuine repentance is not simply intellectual or even volitional (although the latter is its central feature), but affects the whole personality, including the emotions.

### (2) Godly Sorrow (7:9b-10a)

*For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. <sup>10</sup>For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret...*

Paul here reminds his readers of two effects of sorrow or grief. ‘Godly grief’ is a grief that comes from knowing that your actions are displeasing to God. As parents we have learned that godly grief in our children is necessary for salvation and ongoing spiritual health. Sorrow is not enough. A child must own that his or her sin is against God and must be repentant before God. Here, in respect to the Corinthians, Paul rejoices because they have experienced godly grief and the requisite repentance.

Godly sorrow has altogether a positive function, leading to all the blessings of salvation. When Paul says that it ‘leads to salvation,’ he is not implying that the Corinthians had lost their salvation during the time when he and they were at variance with one another. He is making a very general statement about repentance.

On the one hand, there is ‘godly sorrow,’ which produces ‘repentance’ as expressed in earnestness, eagerness, longing, and concern (v. 11) and which issues in salvation (v. 10). There is a play on words here. The Corinthians have expressed a ‘repentance’ (*metamelomai*) that leaves ‘no regret’ (*ametamelēton*).

No one who truly repents will ever regret it or the sorrow that led to it. The Corinthians’ repentance marked them as genuine believers, in the sphere of salvation. It involved turning from sin to God (1 Th. 1:9). True biblical repentance is not psychological, emotional human remorse, seeking merely to relieve stress and improve one’s circumstances. Though it inevitably produces the fruit of a changed life, it is not behavioral, but spiritual.

This passage is incompatible with the teaching that repentance is not necessary for salvation. The progression it reveals is obvious: confrontation of sin leads to sorrow, which leads to repentance, which leads to salvation. Nor will this passage allow repentance to be defined as merely changing one’s mind about who Jesus is. The text inextricably connects repentance with sorrow over sin.

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### (3) Worldly Sorrow (7:10b)

*...whereas worldly grief produces death.*

Alternately, there is ‘worldly sorrow,’ which is at best a shallow remorse, but, which is consumed by bitterness and self-pity and which issues in death. Godly sorrow softens the heart towards God, whereas world sorrow can often harden it once the first pangs of sorrow have passed.

There is a worldly grief that can be very bitter and intense, like that of Esau who grieved with many tears over the loss of his birthright but found no place for repentance (cp. Heb. 12:16-17). Worldly grief is deficient because it is not distinct from sin; rather it is redolent of the very essence of sin and self. This is because self is the center point of sin. Worldly grief is grief for oneself, centered on self, not grief for sin against God. It grieves over consequences. It aches with embarrassment. It focuses on its own hurt. It is self-pitying.

## 2. Good Grief (7:11-13a)

### a) *The Product of the Corinthians’ Repentance (7:11)*

*<sup>11</sup>For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.*

Paul then encourages the Corinthians to reflect on their own experience of this godly sorrow that had recently come into their own lives. There now follows a fascinating series of phrases, each composed of only two words in the Greek, the first in each case being *alla*, here well translated as ‘what.’ Some of these phrases can only be expressed by rather longer phrases in the English. 1) Their ‘earnestness’ revealed how seriously they had taken Paul’s comments on the unsatisfactory situation at the church. They had not brushed aside his trenchant criticisms, but had taken them to heart and acted on them. 2) Paul’s reference to their eagerness to clear themselves, to put things right, shows how different their attitude was now from their apparent reluctance to do so at an earlier time. This then was clear evidence of their true repentance. 3) The ‘indignation’ to which he refers will have been directed towards the person in their church who was the chief cause of the problems there. 4) Their ‘alarm,’ was, of course, because of the sorrow they now realized they had caused Paul. 5) This alarm was accompanied by a ‘longing’ to see him face to face. 7) The concluding phrase, ‘readiness to see justice done,’ testifies to Paul’s warm approval of the fact that their repentance had proved to be much more than an emotional reaction. They had been promoted to take action that would put the matter right.

‘Godly grief’ is then good grief, which Paul describes with a sevenfold rhetorical intensification. Their repentance was verified in seven ways: 1) ‘what earnestness’ as the repentant sinner rejects indifference and becomes intentionally serious about the way he lives; 2) ‘what eagerness’ – whereas before, the Corinthians had been apathetic as to their complicity against Paul, they now strove to prove their loyalty to Paul; 3) ‘what indignation’ against the offender and against themselves for supporting him; 4) ‘what fear’ of God’s judgment as they had sinned against a holy God; 5) ‘what longing’ to make things right with Paul; 6) ‘what zeal’ to honor Paul and to do things right; and 7) ‘what punishment’ demonstrated in their willingness to see Paul’s offender properly dealt with. Godly grief has worked a dynamic repentance. Good grief indeed!

The repeated use of the comparative ‘what before each element underscores the intense emotion Paul felt. 1) First, the Corinthians’ godly sorrow produced an ‘earnestness’ or eagerness for

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righteousness on their part. It ended their indifference toward Paul and their complacency about their sin. They were eager to make things right, to make restitution, to restore their broken relationship with the apostle. 2) Second the Corinthians genuine repentance manifested itself in a desire for ‘vindication.’ *Apologia* (‘vindication’), the source of the English word ‘apologetics,’ literally means ‘a speech in defense.’ The Corinthians had a strong desire to clear their name, remove the stigma of their sin, rid themselves of their guilt, and prove themselves trustworthy. 3) Third, their repentance resulted in ‘indignation.’ *Aganaktēsis* (‘indignation’) appears only here in the New Testament. It is related to the verb *agnakteō*, which means ‘to be indignant’ or ‘to be angry.’ The Corinthians were outraged over their sin; they were angry that they had brought shame on themselves, offended Paul, and sinned against God. 4) Fourth, the Corinthians’ ‘fear’ proved the genuineness of their repentance. They had a reverential fear and awe of God. 5) Fifth, the Corinthians’ repentance resulted in a ‘longing’ or yearning to see their relationship to Paul restored. 6) Sixth, the Corinthians experienced a renewed ‘zeal’ for holiness. 7) Seventh, the Corinthians’ avenging of wrong’ evidence the reality of their repentance. Truly repentant people have a strong desire to see justice done and to make restitution for the wrongs they have committed (cp. 2:6-7). Instead of protecting themselves, they accept the consequences of their sins.

The concluding sentence of this verse can hardly mean, as some commentators have thought, that the Corinthians had managed to persuade Titus they had been without guilt in this matter. This certainly fits very ill with what Paul has said about their deep sorrow and about their repentance. He must mean they had proved themselves now to be innocent by clearing the matter up once and for all. It is their present, not their past innocence, that is in view.

*Hagnos* (‘innocent’) has the idea of ‘pure’ (11:2; Phil. 4:8; Titus 2:5; James 3:17; 1 John 3:3), ‘free from sin’ (1 Tim. 5:22), and ‘chaste’ (1 Peter 3:2). The Corinthians demonstrated the genuineness of their repentance by their purity.

### *b) The Purpose of Paul’s Writing (7:12-13a)*

<sup>12</sup>*So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.* <sup>13</sup>*Therefore we are comforted.*

Commentators are divided over the reason Paul originally wrote his lost letter. Some support the equating of this incident with the moral disciplinary problem set out in 1 Corinthians 5. Others believe there was a dispute between an individual (newly arrived?) in Corinth and Paul. All we can deduce is that Paul speaks of it as ‘the matter’ (v. 11) in which one person did, and another suffered, a ‘wrong’ (v. 12, literally, ‘an injustice’). The opinion that Paul was the one who suffered the wrong seems unlikely in view of his reference to himself not as the other part, but as the third party (see v. 12).

As it turned out, the majority were well disposed towards Paul, as Paul had told Titus (v. 14), but they were, perhaps, slow to express their loyalty to him. It might be concluded that Paul was over-sensitive in this matter. However, it is clear (v. 12) that his primary intention was neither self-vindication nor the punishment of the offender. It was, rather, that the Corinthians’ loyalty for Paul might come into sharp focus, not for his benefit, but for theirs. Paul was thankful that their response to him had been overwhelmingly positive.

Paul is here saying that his major purpose in writing went beyond the discipline of the offender to the mending of the relationship between him and the Corinthians, by making them realize how

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much they really loved him and how unthinkable it was that there should be a permanent barrier between him and them. In saying ‘we are encouraged’ Paul probably means he and Timothy can now see that their ministry among them, both in person and through letters, had not been in vain but that God had truly been at work in it. This must have warmed Paul’s heart considerably.

Paul did not write the severe letter primarily to condemn the man who had caused him so much grief during his painful visit to Corinth (2:1). Nor was his main concern for himself as the one offended; he was not seeking personal vengeance. The most important reason Paul wrote the severe letter was that the Corinthian’s earnestness on his behalf might be made known to them in the sight of God. Sin’s deceitfulness had caused them to lose sight of their earnestness (eagerness), loyalty, and love for Paul and the truth he preached. They had been so deceived that their outward attitude toward the apostle was inconsistent with how they really felt about him. His letter peeled back the layers of deceit that had encrusted their hearts and made known to them their true feelings for him. It restored their spiritual sight and enabled them to see Paul as the trusted servant of God they had always known him to be.

It was the Corinthians’ godly grief and repentance that expanded Paul’s joy. Their response greatly encouraged Paul; it was more important to him than the particular issue that first prompted his letter. The downcast gloom that had shrouded Paul’s soul had lifted with the coming of Titus and now further dissipated with news of the Corinthians repentance.

Paul was experiencing a particular comfort that can only be known by caring, other-directed hearts. It is a comfort that joyously wells up when others spiritually prosper. That is what Paul had hoped for when he wrote the painful letter (cp. 2:3). This other-sourced joy was a distinctive of Paul’s ministry (e.g., Phil. 4:1; 1 Th. 2:19-20; 3:9; cp. 3 John 4).

### **D. Joy in Titus’s Refreshment (2 Corinthians 7:13b-16)**

#### **1. Titus’s Joy (7:13b)**

*And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.*

Perhaps Paul noticed the body language of Titus when they met after Paul’s search for him. In verse 13b it is a verb of sight that he uses about his reunion encounter with Titus. He may well have seen the joy in the bearing of his friend even before he told him what had transpired at Corinth. The actual experience of Titus there had given refreshment to rest to his spirit. In other words, he had greatly enjoyed their fellowship and had left them spiritually renewed.

Titus conveyed to his friend an exciting account of the Corinthians’ welcome. They received him with ‘fear and trembling’ while responding positively to his requests (v. 15), with the result that his spirit had ‘been refreshed’ through his sojourn there. Such news delighted Paul and gave him a profound sense of relief.

Titus’ good report of his visit doubled the joy of Paul and his colleagues. The Corinthians had welcomed him warmly and enthusiastically. Titus had been renewed and refreshed by all the Corinthians did for him. This should be the regular consequence of Christians meeting and enjoying fellowship.

Paul was first lifted from his downcast state by the coming of Titus and then further by news of the Corinthians repentance. And now the cloud is completely lifted by news of Titus’s

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refreshment. Understandably, Titus would have been uneasy in delivering Paul's severe letter to the Corinthians. We have a proverb for it: 'If you don't like the message, kill the messenger.' But any of Titus's worries quickly turned to joy.

*Anapauō* ('refreshed') refers here to temporary relief as opposed to a permanent peace. Though he was overjoyed at what had transpired in Corinth, Paul was wise enough to realize that pockets of dissent still existed. In fact, he addressed those dissenters later in this epistle. But for the moment, there was a truce involving the majority of the Corinthians.

### 2. Paul's Boast (7:14)

<sup>14</sup>*For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true.*

Paul is moving beyond the particular problem that had been concerning him, here referring to the way he had commended the Corinthian believers so fully to Titus before the latter had started out on his mission to that church. This surely shows that the problems that were troubling Paul were confined to part of the church and that the remainder were still giving him much joy.

Paul had hopefully 'boasted' to Titus before sending him to Corinth that the Corinthians would respond obediently. Paul, in a sense, staked his reputation as a man of discernment on the outcome, and he 'was not put to shame.'

Paul was comforted in Titus's joy and peace at the Corinthians' response. He had boasted to Titus of the Corinthians' loyalty. So now his confidence is shown to have been well founded.

### 3. The Corinthians' Obedience (7:15)

<sup>15</sup>*And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.*

What a strange situation! Titus must have gone to Corinth with a real fear in his mind that he, an emissary of Paul, would not be well received by the believers in that city. Yet, at the very same time, those Christians were also fearful, for they wondered whether they could satisfy him that all was well!

In reality, Titus's visit turned into a mutual love-fest. Deep, mutually appreciative friendships developed between Titus and the Corinthians. They came to revere him, treating him 'with fear and trembling' as a messenger of God Himself. It was a refreshed, energized, buoyant Titus who embraced his depressed mentor, Paul, in Macedonia.

The Corinthians' reception of Paul's representative, Titus, with 'fear and trembling' was further evidence of their obedience. Their obedience had calmed Titus's fears and caused him to develop a strong affection for the Corinthian church.

What is the obedience to which Paul refers here? Probably he is referring to some communication that came from him by way of Titus, some word from the Lord. He would then have challenged them to be obedient to what God was saying to them. This is what commentators often infer from his words here and they are probably right. Evidently the Corinthian Christians had received this message very fully and acted on it in obedience. This made the heart of Titus go out to them in love.

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### 4. Paul's Confidence (7:16)

<sup>16</sup>*I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.*

Verse 16 rounds off all Paul has written here. The Corinthians needed to have complete confidence in him, and he wanted, for his part, to have complete confidence in them. The visit of Titus to them, and their reception of him and response to his ministry, had completely reassured him.

Paul's reaffirmation of his trust in the Corinthians brought closure to the issue. 'Confidence' is from *tharreō*, which means, 'to be courageous,' 'to be bold,' or 'to dare.' Paul had the courage to entrust himself to the Corinthians again and dare to believe they would not fail him.

There is an astonishing contrast between Paul's earlier attitude (in Ephesus, 1:8-9; Troas, 2:12; Macedonia, 7:5) and his present one. Here in chapter 7 he expresses tremendous relief and rejoicing in what has happened among the Corinthians. The 'long digression' is so long that the remarkable change of mood is easily missed.

Unspoken but implied is Paul's renewed confidence in the power of God which had so clearly worked through the letter Paul had written. His new confidence arose out of the Corinthians' response to the 'sorrowful' letter. It is a serious mistake to underestimate the impact of the Word of God on those who hear and read it.

We see that Paul's threefold comfort was all of God. God arranged the coming of Titus at just the right time. God affected the Corinthians' godly grief and repentance. God refreshed Titus. And Paul's great, apostolic, other-directed heart was lifted from gloom precisely because he so cared for others. God's comfort was effectual because Paul had the kind of heart that could receive it.

We also see from this account that God's comfort very often comes through the instrumentality of others. And more, we must be sensitive to God's Spirit so we can minister the golden touch—so some will sense that the hand was yours, but it was the hand of God—that the kindness was yours, but it was also the kindness of God—that the voice was yours, but it was the consolation of God.

God employs human agents to comfort His children. Paul expressed deep thanksgiving to God for his comfort through the brother Titus. It is good to recognize that God comforts us in this way and to thank Him for the people He gives us as bearers of His comfort.

The apostles newly restored confidence is a fitting climax to the first section (chapters 1-7) of this epistle. The Corinthians' repentance encouraged Paul to share with them a project that was dear to his heart, the collection for the needy believers in the Jerusalem church (chapters 8-9). It also gave him the boldness to confront the last remaining pockets of resistance to his apostolic authority (chapters 10-13).

For next time: Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-24.