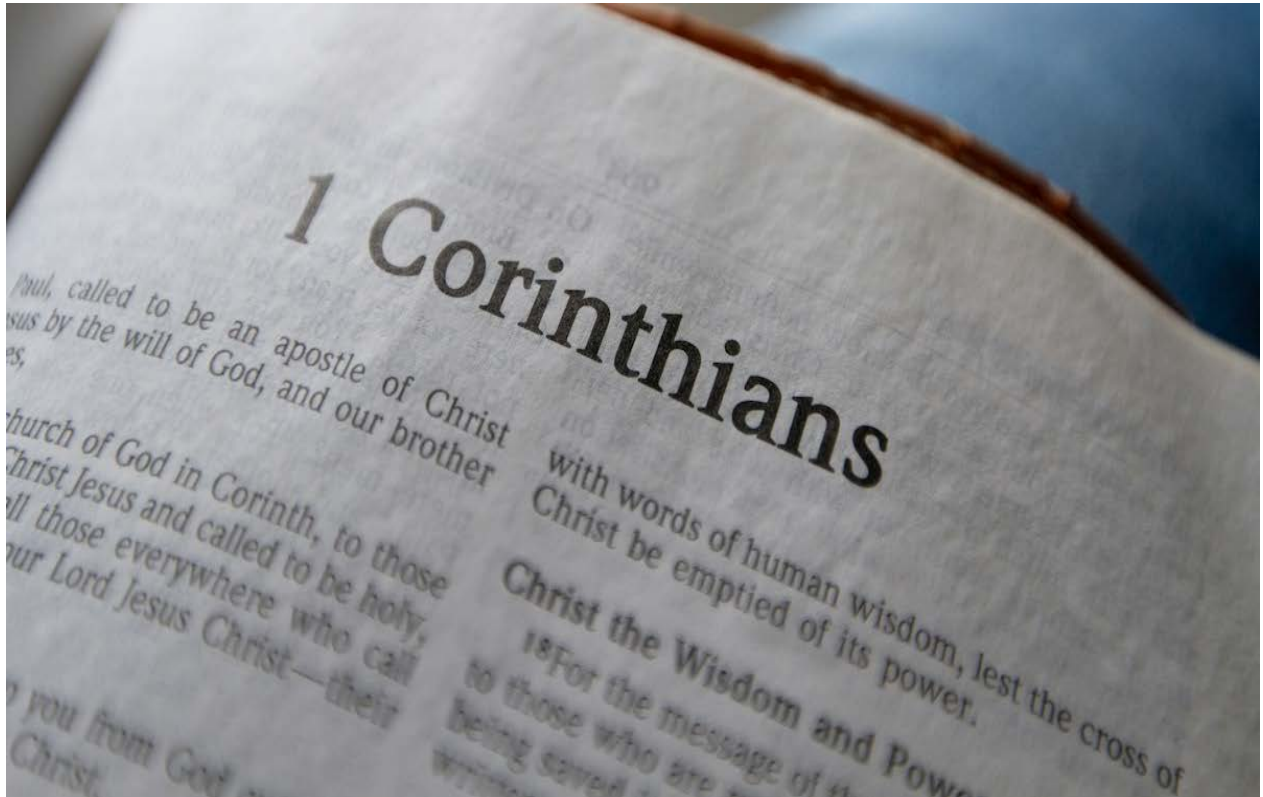


Sorrow to Holiness

2 Corinthians 7

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 24



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

Sorrow to Holiness: 2 Corinthians 7
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 24
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Introduction to *2 Corinthians 7*

Where the Kingdom of God is present and advancing, its true colors will be seen: righteousness (holiness), peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18).

In 2 Corinthians 7 Paul rejoiced—even amid his own great trials—because he could see that the Kingdom was manifesting among the Corinthians. In response to his first epistle, they had become repentant, sorrowful, revived, renewed, reunited, and set back on the Yes Path with Jesus. Paul rejoiced and urged them to continue the good work of bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

God wants us to know joy, joy so deep and true that not even adversity or affliction can keep us from it. Joy comes not from circumstances or things. It issues from the Presence of the Lord. When we are in His Presence and He is making Himself known to, in, and through us, joy just breaks out, and with that joy, holy boasting in the Lord.

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Perfecting Holiness

Pray Psalm 86.16, 17.

Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me!
Give Your strength to Your servant,
And save the son of Your maidservant.
Show me a sign for good,
That those who hate me may see *it* and be ashamed,
Because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Sing Psalm 86.16, 17.

(Andrews: *Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven*)

Turn to me, LORD; be gracious to me;
grant me Your strength; save Your servant, LORD!
Let me a sign of something good see;
shame all who hate me beneath Your Word.
LORD, be gracious to me, LORD, be gracious to me,
for You help me, sovereign Lord!

Read and meditate on 2 Corinthians 7.1.

Preparation

1. To what should God's promises lead?
2. How must we relate to God?

Meditation

The promises to which Paul refers are those stated at the end of chapter 6: God will receive us, make us His people and children, and will dwell and walk with us in all our ways. These are precious and very great promises, indeed, and by them, through our Lord Jesus Christ, we may have true and vital fellowship with God (2 Pet. 1.2-4).

But we must apply ourselves to working out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2.13). This means continuously cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit and taking up those disciplines that lead us to obey the Lord unto sanctification. We will not bring holiness to completion in this lifetime, but we aim at that goal and strive toward it nonetheless. We want to become more like Jesus every day, as we look to the Spirit to open the Word of God to us and show us the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 4.6).

Paul says the promises of God and the fear of God are the twin motivators in this process. The promises remind us of the love and unfailing Presence of the Lord; we obey God because of His love for us and our love for Him. The fear of God acknowledges our deep need of His mercy and grace and our respect for His almighty power. We both love and fear the Lord, therefore, and these together help us make progress in sanctification day by day.

Holiness is the path we walk in our calling to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12). The more we work at holiness, the more we will know the joy and purpose of our salvation.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

It's August, and it's hot. Flies are buzzing and night is about to fall. You have spent the day with numerous children, both yours and those who belong to others. You have had a picnic with all the fixings, and the

finishing touch is watermelon. Lots of it, eaten without utensils, and the juicy essence of it has run down your hands and arms—you are sticky. The children are all sticky, and you are holding one of them on your lap. Now it's time to go home. Earlier at home, this hot August day, you washed and changed the sheets on your bed, and they are fresh and cool to the touch.

The children have all been delivered to their respective homes; amazingly, you brought yours home with you. And now you have a choice: You can either put everyone to bed as is, yourself included, or you can take a cool, soapy, cleansing shower. Either is an option. Please choose correctly.

God is telling us the same: Look, I have given you the promise of being your Father, and I want you to be my children, but you are sticky. I want you to cleanse yourself before you hop into My clean work in the Kingdom. I have given you all the tools you need to get clean (Jesus being first and foremost) so choose wisely.

Paul says to us, “Cleanse” yourself from “all filthiness of the flesh and spirit”; and then he adds, perfect “holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7.1).

Do we have the courage to pray like David did, “Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips. Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies”? (Ps. 141.3, 4)

Will we say with him, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”? (Ps. 139.23, 24)

Are we also willing to say, “Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me”? (Ps. 19.12, 13)

Indeed we are. We have no desire to dirty up God’s clean sheets with our stickiness. Let’s jump in the shower, daily, keeping ourselves, through the power of the Holy Spirit, “always within the boundaries where God’s [Fatherly] love can reach and bless us” (Jude 21 TLB); always keeping our hearts clean and set on keeping God’s decrees “to the very end” (Ps. 119.112 NIV).

So, as God’s blessed sons and daughters, we strive only to be clean before Him, because “everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 Jn. 3.3).

“Perfecting Holiness”

For reflection

1. When do we need to “cleanse” ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit?
2. Why is this important? What can happen if we don’t do this?
3. How can we know when we are increasing in holiness?

The promises of God are strong reasons for us to follow after holiness; we must cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. If we hope in God as our Father, we must seek to be holy as he is holy, and perfect as our Father in heaven. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7.1

Pray Psalm 86.7-15.

Call on the Lord to teach you the way of holiness, to guide and empower you for holiness, and to have mercy on you as you tell His grace and mercy to others.

Sing Psalm 86.7-15.

(Andrews: *Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven*)

When in my trouble, LORD, I call You,
You answer me; there is none like You!
There are no works like Yours, and all whom
You have created shall worship You.
LORD, be gracious to me, LORD, be gracious to me,
all shall glory give to You!

For You are great, You wondrous do;
You are the only and sovereign LORD.
Teach me Your way, let me give heed to,
with all my heart, Savior, all Your Word!
LORD, be gracious to me, LORD, be gracious to me,
praise Your Name forever, LORD!

Great is Your mercy, LORD, toward me;
You have delivered my soul from hell.
Though dreadful foes and threats arrayed be,
You will Your grace and Your mercy tell!
LORD, be gracious to me, LORD, be gracious to me,
slow to anger, loving well!

2 Open to Us!

Pray Psalm 143.1, 2.

Hear my prayer, O LORD,
Give ear to my supplications!
In Your faithfulness answer me,
And in Your righteousness.
Do not enter into judgment with Your servant,
For in Your sight no one living is righteous.

Sing Psalm 143.1, 2.

(Divinum Mysterium: *Of the Father's Love Begotten*)

Hear my earnest prayer, O LORD! Give ear to my pleas for grace!
In Your faithfulness and righteousness, look upon me with Your face!
Enter not to judgment with Your servant, LORD, with Your loving servant, LORD:
None can stand before Your Word.

Read 2 Corinthians 7.1-4; meditate on verses 2-4.

Preparation

1. What did Paul ask of the Corinthians?
2. What did he say about his own speech?

Meditation

Paul's appeal is the heartfelt desire of every sincere teacher of God's Word: Open to me! Hear the Word of the Lord! Receive His Word with gladness and go forth to obey Him!

This is all Paul wanted of the Corinthians. Both his epistles were aimed at this outcome. Paul reminded them that he had been aboveboard and sincere with them (v. 2). He had always told them the truth, even though it was hard to hear at times. He condemned no one but admonished them all (v. 3). His ministry to them was always from a heart of overflowing love, even though at times he had to use great boldness in confronting them (vv. 3, 4).

And just as he had been bold to confront them, now he was joyful and boasting to celebrate their progress, as reported to him by Titus (vv. 6, 7). Amid all his trials, troubles, and afflictions, he could rejoice, like the apostle John, to know that those he loved and had served so diligently were beginning again to walk in the truth (v. 4; cf. 3 Jn. 2-4).

The kindest and most encouraging words any preacher or teacher can hear is that others have heard the Word of God from them, and they rejoice to receive it, and all that the Lord has spoken they will do.

And make sure, each day as you come to the Word of God, that this is the mindset and heartset you bring to His Word. For only then will what He intends as the joy and rejoicing of your heart (Jer. 15.16) transform and equip you for the work of each day.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

Choosing between vanilla or chocolate ice cream, albeit a decision, is not life altering (unless, of course, one is allergic to chocolate).

Choosing to commit our lives to Christ, to follow His Law, to love and obey Him, and to have no other loves

before Him, *is* a life altering decision. Or at least it should be. Paul was alluding to this when he said to his fellow-believers, “You are in our hearts, to die together and to live together” (2 Cor. 7.3).

One could never have accused Paul of a preoccupation with what kind of pizza to bring to youth group or planning when the next frisbee tournament should be scheduled. Of course, there’s nothing wrong with these functions, they just shouldn’t be our driving focus.

Participating in the Kingdom of God is work worth dying and living for. The people of God should be far more eager to serve Someone Who is worthy of dying for, than in living to have a really good time. But sadly, in our unmitigated search for happiness we have managed to marginalize and minimize the church while serving a mini-me god of our own creation.

“Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made” (Is. 2.8).

Jesus said, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Lk. 9.23).

Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2.20).

He also said, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1.21).

Paul took his calling in Christ very seriously. He lived and worked hard for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God, and then died for his faith. Whereupon he immediately entered the Presence of the God of all eternity past, present, and future to really live; as Jesus said, “I AM the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (Jn. 11.25, 26). For Paul, the prize was worth the tribulation (2 Cor. 7.4; Phil. 3.14).

God’s children, in agreement, are a powerful force when we live and die together for God’s glory.

For reflection

1. How would you explain what it means to follow Jesus to someone who was ready to believe in Him?
2. What does it mean for you to take your calling seriously? How does the Spirit of God help you in this?
3. Paul sought to encourage the Corinthians, not to condemn them. Whom will you encourage in following Jesus today?

It is equivalent to, Be ye enlarged, (2 Corinthians 6:13;) that is, "Do not allow corrupt affections, or unfavorable apprehensions, to prevent this doctrine from making its way into your minds, and obtaining a place within you. For as I lay myself out for your salvation with a fatherly zeal, it were unseemly that you should turn a deaf ear upon me." John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7.2-4

Pray Psalm 143.3-12.

Pray for yourself and your church, that God will bind the enemy of our souls so that He will not prevent us from hearing the Word and walking in obedience to it. Cry out to Him to quench your thirst with the living waters of His Word and Spirit.

Sing Psalm 143.3-12.

(Divinum Mysterium: *Of the Father’s Love Begotten*)

See, the enemy pursued my soul; he has crushed and cast me down.
He has made me sit in darkness, LORD, like those dead and in the ground.

Sorrow to Holiness: 2 Corinthians 7

Thus my troubled spirit faints within me, LORD, faints within my weary soul,
and my heart is no more whole.

I recall the days of old; on Your works I meditate—
all the wonders of Your mighty hand, works both small, O LORD, and great.
LORD, my thirsty soul cries out for help to You! To You, LORD, I reach my hand
in a dry and weary land.

Answer quickly, O my LORD! Do not hide from me Your face!
For my spirit fails and I am like those who do not know Your grace.
In the morning let me hear Your steadfast love; LORD I trust You, show my way!
I lift up my soul and pray!

Rescue me from all my enemies! LORD, I refuge seek in You.
Let me know Your will, O LORD my God; make me know what I must do.
Let Your Spirit lead me on to level ground; save my life! Preserve my soul!
Rescue, LORD, and make me whole!

3 God at Work

Pray Psalm 3.1, 2.

LORD, how they have increased who trouble me!
Many are they who rise up against me.
Many *are* they who say of me,
“*There is no help for him in God.*”
Selah

Sing Psalm 3.1, 2.

(Eventide: *Abide with Me*)

LORD, all around my foes are multiplied,
rising against me, like a ‘whelming tide;
many are saying of my weary soul,
“Not even God can save and make him whole!”

Read 2 Corinthians 7.1-7; meditate on verses 5-7.

Preparation

1. How did God comfort Paul?
2. How had He comforted Titus?

Meditation

Paul explained that the work of ministry had worn him down—opposition from without, fears and concerns abounding within (v. 5).

But God knows how to comfort and encourage His children. He does not leave us to languish in our troubles and trials. He comes to us with the comfort of His Presence, the encouragement of His Spirit, and the tender love of colleagues and friends.

What is so remarkable about these verses is that Paul is bearing witness to “God, who comforts the downcast”. But he connects His comfort and encouragement with Titus’ arrival, bearing the good report about how the Corinthians responded to Paul’s first letter. Paul was thus encouraged by Titus *and* the Corinthians, as Titus himself had been encouraged by them (vv. 6, 7).

That is, God did His work of comforting His saints through the faithful ministrations of other saints. Paul confronted and instructed the Corinthians, who were duly admonished and rightly encouraged. Their positive response encouraged Titus, who then went to Paul in Macedonia with the report that encouraged him amid all his trials.

Our great and sovereign, loving and compassionate heavenly Father does His work—at least this part of His work—through people, people like you and me. People who hear His Word and get busy obeying it. God is truly at work within the faithful believer, willing and doing according to His good pleasure (Phil. 2.13). Who knows how God might be pleased to work through you today? Are you ready? Willing? Available?

Somebody’s day will brighten with hope, peace, and encouragement because of you. God, that is, at work in you.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

In all of life, in every circumstance, through each trial and tribulation, we have an “out” that those in the world do not have— “Nevertheless God” (2 Cor. 7.6).

“For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God.
He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice,
a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He...
Is He not your Father, who bought you?
Has He not made you and established you?” (Deut. 32.3, 4, 6).

“He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Heb. 13.5).

In our hearts and spirits, through His Word, we experience the tender love and care of God our Father. But sometimes God uses us, His messengers, to do His work; and to show and tell His love. And He often uses others to do the same for us.

When God saw that His children were being oppressed by the Egyptians, instead of blowing Pharaoh and his ilk off the face of the planet, He sent Moses to do His work for Him in a kinder and gentler way.
“I have seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land...Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt” (Ex. 3.7, 8, 10).

We, too, like Moses, are available to be used by God to do His work amongst His people and the world. It is why we are saved. It is our calling and purpose. As Jesus said, “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you” (Jn. 20.21).

And as Paul encouraged us, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation...” (2 Cor. 1.3-6).

Yes, “our great and sovereign, loving and compassionate heavenly Father does His work—at least this part of His work—through people, people like you and me.”

God at work, in us and through us—nevertheless God!

For reflection

1. How do you expect God to be at work in and through you today?
2. How should you prepare each day for the work God wants to do in and through you?
3. Whom will you encourage today in the work of the Lord?

[Paul] declares, that the occasion of his joy was, that Titus had, on returning from them, communicated the most joyful intelligence. Accordingly he declares, that it was not so much the presence of one individual, as the prosperous condition of the Corinthians, that had cheered him. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7.5-7

Pray Psalm 3.3-8.

Praise God for the comfort and encouragement He provides through family and faithful friends. Ask Him to

use you to comfort and encourage others today.

Sing Psalm 3:3-8.

(Eventide: *Abide with Me*)

You are a mercy shield about me, LORD,
raising me by Your glory and Your Word.
Prayers fraught with tears stream from me like a fount,
yet God will answer from His holy mount.

Waking and sleeping, guarded by Your grace,
when foes by thousands stand before my face,
when countless dangers 'round me are arrayed,
I will not fear, I will not be afraid!

Rise up, O LORD, rise up and rescue me!
Let all my foes destroyed and routed be!
Grace and salvation, LORD, are Yours alone;
bless and protect all those You call Your own.

4 Love Hurts. Sometimes.

Pray Psalm 139.23, 24.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if *there is any* wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.

Sing Psalm 139.23, 24.

(Ripley: *Hallelujah! Praise Jeborah, O My Soul*)

Search my heart, O LORD, and know me, as You only, LORD, can do.
Test my thoughts and contemplations, whether they be vain or true.
Let there be no sin in me, LORD, nothing that Your Spirit grieves.
Lead me in the righteous way, LORD, unto everlasting peace!

Read 2 Corinthians 7.1-10; meditate on verses 8-10.

Preparation

1. Of what was Paul not sorry?
2. Why was sorrow necessary for the Corinthians?

Meditation

Titus reported to Paul that his first letter to the Corinthians had afflicted them with sorrow. We can see why. They became downcast, disappointed in themselves, and repentant before the Lord; and this would not have happened if Paul had not made them face up to their childish, sinful ways and get back on the Yes Path with Jesus.

So he was not sorry that he had made them sorrowful. Theirs was godly sorrow, and it only lasted for a little while (v. 8). Once they began to change their ways, repenting of their sins and seeking the Lord for His good and perfect will, they soon recovered their joy in Him (v. 9). They were in danger of losing the greatness of Jesus' salvation, and Paul was determined not to let that happen. The godly sorrow to which his letter brought them was the necessary precondition for true repentance and renewal (v. 10).

Love can hurt sometimes. But if it's true love—like the love Paul had for the Corinthians—then the hurt will only be brief. Healing will follow as the Lord works on our hearts to correct our misguided affections and wayward ways. Every next step of repentance and renewal will bring us deeper into the joy of the Lord, and we will remember the hurt no more.

As the Lord searches our hearts daily, He may bring to mind thoughts or ways that neither please Him nor edify our brethren. We will be chagrined, ashamed even, and sorrowful. But as we confess our sins and call on the Lord for the grace of repentance, our joy will return and with that joy, the confidence that God will use us in His work by the renewing power of His Word and Spirit.

God afflicted His Son Jesus so that, when He afflicts us, we may remember Jesus' suffering for our sins and rejoice in the soul-hurting, soul-healing love of our heavenly Father.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Our brother Asaph, the psalmist, felt himself about to slip into sin. His relationship with God was close enough that when God warned him that sin was lying at his door, he chose to rule over it (Gen. 4.7) and regain his footing with the LORD.

He reported, “My steps had nearly slipped, for I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Ps. 73.2, 3).

But then he had this conviction, “Thus my heart was grieved, and I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You” (Ps. 73.21, 22).

Which led to his epiphany, “Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Ps. 73.23, 24).

His sorrow led to repentance, which finally led to blissful rejoicing and love, for he was then able to say, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73. 25. 26).

Solidly restored in his hope and salvation, he could say with assurance, “For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all Your works” (Ps. 73.27, 28).

Back in the saddle again.

This is how it goes for the children of God: He loves us enough to convict us of sin through His Word and the Holy Spirit (Heb. 4.12, 13); and He is gracious enough to forgive us of sin when we ask Him to (1 Jn. 1.9). We are then restored to get back to work in His Kingdom and for His glory.

And we hold in our hearts the promise from God of what He can do, how He can make sorrow go away, and how we will rejoice perpetually, fervently, and eternally in Him: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev. 21.3, 4).

Sorrow leading to repentance leading to LIFE—“remembering Jesus’ suffering for our sins and rejoicing in the soul-hurting, soul-healing love of our heavenly Father.”

“Now I rejoice” (2 Cor. 7.9).

For reflection

1. What is your practice of allowing the Lord to search your soul?
2. Why should that practice sometimes lead to sorrowing? What should you do then?
3. We should expect to know godly sorrow from time to time. Why?

There is a great difference between this sorrow of a godly sort, and the sorrow of the world. The happy fruits of true repentance are mentioned. Where the heart is changed, the life and actions will be changed. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7.5-11

Pray Psalm 139.11-18.

Thank God that He knows and loves you. Praise Him for making you who you are, and call on Him to empower you to fulfill your calling today.

Sing Psalm 139.11-18.

(Ripley: *Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah, O My Soul*)

Neither light nor dark conceals me; day as night is with You, LORD!
All my inward parts You fashioned by Your all-decreeing Word.
Praise the LORD, for You have made me; all Your wondrous works I'll tell!
All Your works declare Your glory, and my soul knows this full well!

All my unformed frame You witnessed when You destined all my days.
Precious to me, LORD, Your precepts; all Your wondrous Word I praise.
More than sand, Your thoughts to me, LORD, far too vast their sum for me!
When the morning breaks upon me, in Your Presence I shall be.

5 The Fruit of Godly Sorrow

Pray Psalm 38.1-4.

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your wrath,
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure!
For Your arrows pierce me deeply,
And Your hand presses me down.
There is no soundness in my flesh
Because of Your anger,
Nor *any* health in my bones
Because of my sin.
For my iniquities have gone over my head;
Like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

Sing Psalm 38.1-4.

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

O LORD, rebuke me not, nor chasten me in wrath!
Your arrows pierce my sinful heart and block my path.
Your heavy hand weighs down;
my flesh and bones grow weak.
My sins oppress, confuse, confound—I cannot speak!

Read 2 Corinthians 7.1-12; meditate on verses 11, 12.

Preparation

1. What “proofs” of good faith did the Corinthians show?
2. Why did Paul cause them to sorrow?

Meditation

Why did Paul cause the Corinthians to sorrow? Shouldn't pastors only make their people happy? Feel good about themselves?

Well, no. Paul cared for the Corinthians so much that he was willing to confront them in their sins and call them to repentance. This is what caring pastors do (v. 12). The Corinthians had allowed a fiery boil of sin to settle on their churches, and Paul resolved to lance it. Doing so was painful—for them and him—but needed. And look at the benefits that derived from their repentance.

Paul noted seven positive outcomes of godly sorrow, all of which, taken together gave proof of the true faith and salvation of the Corinthian believers. Once they had confessed and repented of their various sins, they became *diligent* about returning to the Yes Path in Jesus. In doing so, they *cleared* themselves of every remaining bit of the sins Paul enumerated, becoming *indignant*—probably at the devil—about having languished so long in them. *Fear* of God returned to them, together with a *vehement desire* to be pleasing to the Lord. With great *zeal* they *vindicated* themselves as true believers (v. 11).

Godly sorrow yields vital, life-giving fruit. It may be painful or embarrassing to endure, but if we keep our eyes on Jesus and the promises of God He has fulfilled, we can endure godly sorrow and get on with working out our salvation as we should.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

Remembering God's works of the past bolsters our faith in the present:

“I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all Your works;
I muse on the work of Your hands” (Ps. 143.5).

One of the great joys of sharing prayer requests with fellow believers is the rehearsing of God’s answers. The joys we corporately share in His majestic power and tender mercies shown toward His children.

Paul was doing that very same thing with the Corinthians. He wanted them to rehearse together with him all the good that had come from their godly sorrow leading to repentance and restoration. “For observe this very thing”, he wrote (2 Cor. 7.11), “and let’s talk about how God has worked in your life; because we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8.28).

He wanted them to rehearse, and truly own, the attributes they had acquired in their quest for sanctification. They had become diligent in spiritual growth, they had been cleared from guilt, they had gotten a distaste for sin in themselves and others, they had a healthy fear and respect for God, they were vehement in their desire to please Him, had a new zeal for godly character and living, and they knew their sins were forgiven.

How can young and old men and women cleanse their ways? By taking heed according to God’s Word (Ps. 119.9). And God’s Word tells us that it is only through the work of Jesus Christ that we can be clean before Him: Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5.25-27).

This glorious truth and promise is why we strive through sanctification to be found with the same attributes that the Corinthians had attained. Only Jesus can do this for us. So, we come to Him daily, and say to Him, as the leper did, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean” (Matt. 8.2). He is and He will.

Daily, we observe this, with thanksgiving, always remembering, meditating and musing upon what He has done for us (Ps. 95.1-3, 6, 7; Rom. 5.8).

For reflection

1. What proof of salvation will you demonstrate before the Lord today?
2. What would you say are the keys to growing through a time of godly sorrow?
3. How do you know when you have truly repented of a sin?

[Paul] simply proves the repentance of the Corinthians from its signs, or accompaniments. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7.11

Pray Psalm 38.9-12, 17-22.

Thank the Lord for bringing you to godly sorrow at times. Ask Him to help you see all He has for you to learn from every such experience.

Sing Psalm 38.9-12, 17-22.

(Leoni: *The God of Abraham Praise*)

You know all my desire, my sighs You know full well.
My strength fails and light’s holy fire my eyes dispel.
My friends and loved ones fail;
the wicked do me wrong.
My life they seek, my soul assail the whole day long.

My sins I now confess; my anxious soul relieve!
Though foes are strong, LORD, heal and bless all who believe!
Forsake me not, O LORD!
Repay my foes with wrath.
Stand by me with Your saving Word and guard my path!

6 A Soul Refreshed

Pray Psalm 42.1-3.

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me,
“Where *is* your God?”

Sing Psalm 42.1-3.

(Nettleton: *Come, Thou Fount*)

As the deer pants for fresh water let my soul, LORD, pant for You!
Let my soul thirst as it ought to for the Savior, ever true!
Tears by day have been my portion, tears by night have been my food,
while my foes add to my sorrow, saying, “Where now is your God?”

Read 2 Corinthians 7.1-16; meditate on verses 13-16.

Prepare

1. What effect did the obedience of the Corinthians have on Titus?
2. How did that affect Paul?

Meditation

Paul rejoiced that the soul of Titus had been refreshed by the Corinthians’ godly sorrow leading to repentance (v. 13). Paul was comforted and encouraged, especially because he had boasted to Titus about the Corinthians, expressing confidence in them, that they would receive his letter and amend their ways (v. 14).

When Titus arrived, the Corinthians received him “with fear and trembling” (v. 15). He could see their contrition and obedience, and this greatly refreshed his soul, causing him to love the Corinthians even more (v. 15). When he gave his report to Paul, the apostle rejoiced and his confidence in the Corinthians was renewed (v. 16).

This is how grace works. Where you read the words “comfort” or “refreshed” or “obedience” or “rejoice” you’re reading the outward manifestations of what Paul described in 2 Corinthians 4.15—grace spreading to more and more people. Paul brought the grace of truth and tough love to the Corinthians. By the grace of God, they heard, humbled themselves, set matters right, and received Titus in his follow-up visit. The grace he saw in them (cf. Acts 11.22, 23) brought great refreshment to his soul, and when he reported the evidence of their grace to Paul, Paul rejoiced in the grace of the Lord.

When we as grace-spreaders do our work—receiving the grace of God and spreading it around to others—good and glorious things happen, especially that thanks and praise go up to God.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

There is something beautiful about grace at work through fear and trembling. Those three words seems incongruous, and yet, they are not. Without a healthy fear of God, we will not respect His wishes nor appreciate His grace. Without trembling at what God can do, we will not fully appreciate the love that keeps Him from doing it.

When there is not a godly respect for spiritual leaders and friends, we do not properly appreciate the grace they show to us, nor the teaching they are ready and willing to give us.

“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!
Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints!
There is no want to those who fear Him” (Ps. 34.8, 9).

We are to exhibit “fear and trembling” as we work out our own salvation (Phil. 2.12). And the Corinthians felt a bit of “fear and trembling” at the appearance of Titus, Paul’s emissary (2 Cor. 7.15). They respected Paul and his words of conviction, and they also respected his representative. Titus’ visit was worth his time and effort—it blessed him as well as the Corinthians. This is the way mutual love and respect should work in God’s Kingdom economy.

Paul also rejoiced that Titus was comforted, as were the Corinthians. Paul’s heart overflowed because his friend was refreshed by them. His boasting over them was found to be true. “And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, both that you do and will do the things we command you” (2 Thess. 3.4). Paul’s joy was as full towards the Corinthians as it was for the Thessalonians.

As God’s children, we are daily either being refreshed by or refreshing our fellow-believers. It is how we encourage one another to do the good works that we have been called to do (Eph. 2.10). When we are “grace-spreaders” good and glorious things do happen, “especially that thanks and praise go up to God.” Souls all around are refreshed, renewed, and rejoicing because of the free-flowing grace of God.

As Paul said to the church in Rome, “...that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen” (Rom. 15.32, 33).

In fear and trembling, spread some grace!

For reflection

1. In your walk with and work for the Lord, who refreshes your soul? Give thanks to God and tell those who refresh your soul that you appreciate their ministry.
2. What happens when your soul is refreshed? How do you experience the refreshing of your soul?
3. What opportunities will you have today to refresh the soul of a fellow believer? How should you prepare for that?

Titus had been overjoyed in finding them more obedient and compliant than could have been expected — nay more, in his finding a sudden change for the better. Hence we may infer, that Paul’s gentleness was anything but flattery, inasmuch as he rejoiced in their joy, so as to be, at the same time, chiefly taken up with their repentance. John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7.13-16

Pray Psalm 42.4-11.

Call on the Lord to comfort and encourage you in your soul, and to use you today to refresh the souls of others.

Sing Psalm 42.4-11.

(Nettleton: *Come, Thou Fount*)

Now I pour my soul out in me as these thoughts come to my mind.
And I long to once again be where true worship I might find.
Oh my soul, be not despairing! Hope in God, and praise His Name!

For the LORD, your burden bearing, will restore your peace again.

Oh my God, my soul is weary, therefore I remember You.
Let Your grace and goodness near be, and Your promise, firm and true.
LORD, when trials and fears surround me, Your commands will be my song!
When distresses sore confound me, Your great love will keep me strong.

LORD, forget me not in mourning 'neath my foes' oppressing hand.
See their mocking, hear their scorning; help my weary soul to stand.
Hope in God, praise Him forever when despair on you has trod.
Look to Jesus; never, never doubt your gracious, saving God.

7 Rejoicing in Holiness

Pray Psalm 128.1, 2.

Blessed *is* every one who fears the LORD,
Who walks in His ways.
When you eat the labor of your hands,
You *shall be* happy, and it *shall be* well with you.

Sing Psalm 128.1, 2.

(Fountain: *There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood*)

How blessed are they who fear YOU, LORD, who walk within Your ways!
Rejoicing in Your bounteous Word, they prosper all their days!
They prosper all their days, they prosper all their days!
Rejoicing in Your bounteous Word, they prosper all their days!

Review 2 Corinthians 7.1-16; meditate on verses 4-7, 9, 13-16.

Preparation

1. What is the most recurrent idea in this chapter?
2. What is the source of this?

Meditation

Where the Kingdom of God is present and advancing, its true colors will be seen: righteousness (holiness), peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). In 2 Corinthians 7 Paul rejoiced—even amid his own great trials (v. 5)—because he could see that the Kingdom was manifesting among the Corinthians. In response to his first epistle, they had become repentant, sorrowful, revived, renewed, reunited, and set back on the Yes Path with Jesus. Paul rejoiced and urged them to continue the good work of bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God (v. 1).

True joy is the consequence of being in the Presence of the Lord (Ps. 16.8). When God's people submit to His Word and yield to the inward work of His Spirit (2 Cor. 3.12-18), the grace of God becomes evident in them. The Spirit bears righteous fruit, floods their souls with the peace of Jesus, and draws out the joy of knowing the Lord in all who believe and obey Him. That joy is infectious. From the Corinthians it spread to Titus, from Titus to Paul, and from Paul back to the Corinthians—grace leading to rejoicing in the Lord and boasting in Him.

God wants us to know joy, joy so deep and true that not even adversity or affliction can keep us from it. Joy comes not from circumstances or things. It issues from the Presence of the Lord. When we are in His Presence and He is making Himself known to, in, and through us, joy just breaks out, and with that joy, holy boasting in the Lord.

We are saved for joy: Joy to the world! The Lord is come! Godly sorrow for sin coupled with true repentance and resetting our steps with the Lord (v. 11) will bring us back into His Presence, back under the cope of His power, back on the Yes Path with Jesus, and back to fullness of joy and holy pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11).

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” So wrote the young missionary Jim Elliot, who, before he grew old, was martyred for his faith in Jesus Christ.

“I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation...therefore I rejoice” (2 Cor. 7.4, 16).

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1.21).

These are the truths that spurred him on in Kingdom service, truths that run rampant through Scripture; and truths that Paul also wrote, and lived, and died by.

“God wants us to know joy, joy so deep and true that not even adversity or affliction can keep us from it. Joy comes not from circumstances or things. It issues from the Presence of the Lord.”

“You will show me the path of life;
In Your Presence is fullness of joy;
At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16.11; cf. Ps. 23.3; Jn. 15.11)

“True joy is the consequence of being in the Presence of the Lord.” Let us stay obediently in His Presence; gladly giving up what we cannot keep, to gain what we cannot lose.

*All for Jesus! All for Jesus! All my being's ransomed pow'rs;
All my thoughts and words and doings, All my days and all my hours.*

*Let my hands perform His bidding, Let my feet run in His ways;
Let my eyes see Jesus only, Let my lips speak forth His praise.*

*Since my eyes were fixed on Jesus, I've lost sight of all besides;
So enchained my spirit's vision, Looking at the Crucified.*

*O, what wonder! How amazing! Jesus, glorious King of kings,
Deigns to call me His beloved, Lets me rest beneath His wings.
(Mary D. James, 1889)*

For reflection

1. How do you experience the Presence of God?
2. What can rob you of the joy God wants you to know?
3. Whom will you encourage today in the joy of the Lord?

*Assuredly, it is not sumptuous banquets, it is not splendid apparel, it is not courteous and honorable salutations, it is not the plaudits of the multitude, that gratify the upright and faithful pastor. He experiences, on the other hand, an overflowing of delight, when the doctrine of salvation is received with reverence from his mouth, when he retains the authority that belongs to him for the edification of the Church, when the people give themselves up to his direction, to be regulated by his ministry under Christ's banners. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on 2 Corinthians 7.16**

Pray Psalm 128.3-6.

Praise the Lord for His promise to be with us always (Matt. 28.20). Praise Him with rejoicing that He is present in you, in your home, throughout your church, and in all the many blessings He provides day by day.

Sing Psalm 128.3-6.

(Fountain: *There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood*)

Their homes with happy children bloom who fear Your holy Name;
their tables and their every room declare Your glorious fame!
Declare Your glorious fame, declare Your glorious fame!
Their tables and their every room declare Your glorious fame!

O LORD, from Zion send Your peace, and prosp'rous make our ways;
thus may Your blessings e'er increase upon us all our days!
Upon us all our days, upon us all our days!
Thus may Your blessings e'er increase upon all us all our days!

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Why did Paul rejoice? What is joy and how can we know it?
2. What was the effect of repentance on the Corinthians? What should we learn from their example?
3. Has God ever brought you to “godly sorrow” over anything? Has He ever used you—like Paul—to help someone else know this gift?
4. How does grace “circulate” among the people of God? What is your role in that process?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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