

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS FOR 11/29/09
2 CORINTHIANS 7:2-16

2 Corinthians 7:2-4: Words of Encouragement

Paul finished his previous discussion in chapter 6 with an appeal for the Corinthians to set themselves apart from the cultural expectations of their environment. In his call for them to be reconciled to God, Paul urges this body of believers to live lives that reflect the truth of their reconciled state. Having all of the promises of God at their disposal, Paul asks them to be clean, pure, and holy in the sight of God. To this point, Paul has spent a considerable amount of effort defending his ministry and his calling, as well as his deep love for the Corinthians. Both his authority as an apostle and his affection as their spiritual father, give Paul the right to confront this church regarding behavioral and relational issues. As we come to 2 Cor. 7:2-4, Paul concludes the first part of his letter, namely the defense and explanation of the New Covenant ministry (2:14-7:4).

2 Cor. 7:2, begins with the words, “make room for us *in your hearts*” or “open *your hearts* to us.” Although the phrase “your hearts” does not occur in the Greek text, this verse echoes Paul’s assertion in 2 Cor. 6:11 where he states “Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide.” Paul has made it clear that he has left nothing hidden, that he has completely exposed himself to the point of vulnerability on behalf of the Corinthian congregation. Now he calls for a reciprocal response. Paul is still on the subject of the Corinthians’ behavior, but he approaches them relationally. Not only are there ethical issues to correct, there is also the looming relational issue of the Corinthians’ perspective and treatment of Paul. Following this request for the Corinthians to open their hearts, Paul makes a strong threefold statement regarding how he has treated them: we have wronged no one (but there is a person who has publically wronged Paul, 7:12), we corrupted no one (but the false apostles are corrupting the Corinthians, 11:3), we took advantage of no one (despite accusations brought against him, 12:16). Paul’s motives toward the Corinthians are pure and he again reminds them that everything he does (even if it causes temporary pain to the Corinthians) is under the compulsion of Christ’s love and on their behalf.

Paul then goes on to make the statement in 7:3 that he does not speak to condemn them. Paul has had numerous conversations with the Corinthians: his first letter to the Corinthians, his second letter (the severe letter) which spoke harshly regarding their actions and what they needed to do to remedy the situation, and now he writes again in order to encourage them and motivate them to move forward in their faith. Paul’s point is that even though he speaks to them (writes to them) confronting difficult circumstances (in particular their relationship with him) it has been for a greater purpose which will be forthcoming in the next section (7:5-16). Paul then makes the statement in 7:3 that the Corinthians are in his heart to die together and to live together. Although, much can be made about the verbs to die and to live, what Paul is essentially saying is that he is in this Christian walk together with them. Paul is not some super saint who stands removed from the difficulties of this world (as he has made abundantly

clear). Paul is someone who understands the struggles of the flesh, but who also understands how to turn to God in those struggles and who asks this congregation to imitate him in this respect.

7:4 provides not only the concluding thought for Paul on the subject of his love for the Corinthians, but it is also both the capstone to his long discussion of the New Covenant ministry (2:14-7:4) and the transitional bridge to the next discussion which Paul will undertake. In 7:4 we encounter several themes that have been prominent to this point: confidence, boasting, comfort, and joy. Confidence and boasting have appeared throughout this letter in a dual sense. Paul has placed his confidence over and against that of the boasting confidence of the false teachers. In contrast to the false teachers who boast in themselves, Paul has said that his confidence is through Christ toward God (2 Cor. 3:4) and that his ministry is established on the fact that all that he does is open before God. Paul also says that his confidence is in the Corinthians. This opens the door for the discussion begun in 2 Cor. 2 and resumed in 2 Cor. 7:5-16, namely Paul's defense for changing his travel plans and not coming to Corinth as he had promised. In 2 Cor. 2:3, Paul says that he did not come to Corinth, but instead sent a harsh letter of rebuke with Titus with the hope and confidence that when the Corinthians were confronted with their actions, they would have a change of heart and reevaluate their behavior in light of God's grace. In 2:3, Paul assures them of his confidence that the sorrow produced by the letter will ultimately turn to joy for both parties. In 7:4, Paul reiterates the same thing, with a slight change in tone. Now Paul writes of his great, overflowing, exceedingly abundant confidence, boasting, and joy. Whereas previously Paul says, "having confidence," now he makes bold statements that his confidence has been substantiated. In this verse, Paul stresses the overabundance of his confidence and we will soon learn that this is based on the positive response of the Corinthians to Paul's severe letter. The themes of confidence, boasting, comfort, and joy will continue throughout this passage as Paul praises this church for acting like he expected them to act. The final phrase in 7:4 reminds us that Paul's ministry is carried out in the face of affliction and this serves to remind the Corinthians that despite the hardships that Paul endures in bearing the gospel of Christ, it is his greatest joy to witness the full effect of the gospel in people's hearts.

2 Corinthians 7:5-7: Paul's Joy at the Arrival of Titus

Having set the stage for this next discussion, Paul now returns to a subject broached in chapter 2, and further elaborated upon in 7:5-9:15. Paul has explained to the Corinthians that his reason for not returning to Corinth as he promised and sending a harsh letter via Titus instead, was because he wanted to avoid another humiliating experience with them (I intended to come to you, 1:14; I did not come to Corinth in order to spare you, 1:23; I determined that I would not come to you again in sorrow, 2:1). He would not return to Corinth until he knew that the Corinthians were ready to receive him. Now Paul chronicles Titus' experience in Corinth and his own overwhelming response to the good news of their changed behavior.

In 7:5, Paul explains the torment he underwent as he waited for Titus' response to his letter. 2 Cor. 2:12 tells us that Paul went to Troas anxiously waiting for a report from Titus, but when he did not find him there he departed to Macedonia. Although Paul expresses his confidence in the Corinthians to ultimately make the right decision concerning their support of him, and thus their acceptance of the gospel, waiting for the detailed report was agonizing for Paul. Paul went to Macedonia (where the churches of Philippi and Thessalonica are located) and continued his work there. Although Paul's relationship with these two churches is positive, there was external conflict he faced in both cities, coupled with the uncertainty of the situation in Corinth. Paul describes this experience as physically and mentally exhausting, and depressing (some translations read downcast). In this state however, the God of all comfort intercedes. Just as Paul describes in 2 Cor. 1:3-7, God acts to comfort and encourage Paul in his affliction and to use this same comfort to bring encouragement to others. The source of Paul's comfort is the coming of Titus. The Greek word for Titus' "coming" is *parousia* which is most often used to describe the second coming of Christ. Although not used in such a theological sense, there is an element of the grand about Titus' appearance. Although Paul certainly cared for Titus as a fellow worker in the gospel, the comfort that Titus brought was his own contentment with the way in which the Corinthians received Paul's message. Titus reported back to Paul that he was comforted by the longing, the mourning, and the zeal that the Corinthians expressed for Paul. The fact that Titus' own contentment regarding the situation brings Paul such relief leaves the possibility open that despite Paul's confidence Titus may have had his own concerns. Titus walks into Corinth after Timothy had received a questionable reception (1 Cor. 16:10), Paul had been notified of various factions existing in Corinth, Paul had visited Corinth and been badly received, and now Titus bears a letter that Paul himself describes as written with tears and anguish (2 Cor. 2:4). Regardless of what Titus may have been feeling as he entered Corinth, Paul's letter, Titus' ministry, and the Spirit of God working in the hearts of the Corinthians (upon which formed the basis for Paul's confidence) produced the desired effect. Paul's response is one of superabundant joy. Titus will continue to have a ministry in Corinth, and it is necessary that the Corinthians respond well both to Paul and to Titus.

2 Corinthians 7:8-12: Paul's Joy at Their Reception of the Letter

2 Cor. 7:8-12 describes the Corinthians' response to Paul's letter and his joy that they chose to heed his guidance as their spiritual father. It is important to understand Paul's apostolic authority in the early church. The Corinthians had no other place to turn for guidance in spiritual matters. They had no church history, no denominational guidelines, no set of by-laws—they were first generation Christians in a primarily pagan world. They could not download sermons, read books on theology, or go to the church down the road if they did not like what Paul said. Paul gave them the gospel and although they had the Spirit of God dwelling in them, guiding them, and teaching them, God also appointed Paul and his coworkers to guide this church. Their response to Paul was critical because if they do not like his teaching, they have nowhere else to go. 2 Cor. 7:8, may sound harsh, but in light of Paul's calling as an apostle, it was absolutely necessary that the Corinthians felt the pain of their wrong choices. What

were the problems that the Corinthians were facing? 1) They had failed to discipline a member of their church who had offended Paul. In not disciplining the offender, they were failing to support Paul and his message. 2) They were falling sway to the teaching of false apostles. 3) They were continuing to engage in questionable practices regarding their relational alliances. 4) They had failed to follow through on gathering a collection (this will be the main topic of chapters 8 and 9).

The Corinthians did not respond to Paul well when he visited them after writing 1 Corinthians, so in his severe letter to them, he is apparently quite harsh. Paul's theme in this passage however, is one of joy. Joy because the pain the Corinthians experienced served its purpose, and joy because the pain was short-lived. Paul's regret was not that he sent the letter, but that a situation arose that prompted him to send the letter. In hindsight, Paul can rejoice. We do not know the particulars of Timothy's report back to Paul, but what we do know from this passage is that: 1) The Corinthians were made sorrowful by the letter. 2) Their sorrow led them to a genuine repentance (a change of mind and a change of behavior). 3) They appropriately disciplined the offender (2 Cor. 2:6). 4) Their behavior has garnered them the proclamation of innocence on behalf of Paul.

Regarding the first and second point, we do not know exactly how the Corinthians expressed their sorrow, but we know that it led them to a repentance that Paul describes as godly. In 7:9-10, Paul makes it clear that this sorrow was according to the will of God, or a godly sorrow, which leads to salvation, or life. Paul is not talking here about repentance that is part of the initial salvation experience, but a repentance that is part of the daily life, or the process of living out one's salvation. This repentance is contrasted with a worldly sorrow that leads to death. There are numerous examples in Scripture of those who were deeply sorrowful, but whose sorrow did not draw them closer to God. Heb. 12:17 cites Esau as an example of this type of sorrow. Esau rejected his blessing and afterwards he was sorry. He approached his father with tears, but the author of Hebrews understands Esau's sorrow to be of the worldly type. He regretted his actions, but he did not repent on the level that restores relationship. An example of godly sorrow would be that of David. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, but Psalm 51 gives us an insight into David's realization that not only was there sorrow, but his sin was also against God.

7:11 makes it clear that the Corinthians' repentance was in the same vein as David's. Paul describes them as having an earnest godly sorrow that produces vindication of themselves (*apologia* or a defense of themselves), fear (likely the fear of God that Paul previously spoke of that leads one to recognize that their behavior is ultimately judged by Christ), longing (which in 7:7 was a longing for Paul), zeal, and avenging of wrong (or rendering of justice, the wrong likely being that of the offender). Paul then states that the Corinthians demonstrated their innocence in the matter. He uses the legal terms "avenge," "demonstrate," "innocent," and "manner" to declare that the Corinthians had without a doubt proven that they are genuinely disposed toward God and heeding Paul's guidance.

Regarding our third point, we know from chapter 2 that the Corinthians did discipline the person who offended Paul. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 2:9 that he put them to the test when he asked him to discipline this man, in order to see whether they were obedient. Paul reiterates this point in v. 12 when he says that this act of church discipline had a greater purpose than confronting the offender or clearing the offended. It was to see what was in the hearts of the Corinthians. In this, they were true to Paul, but more importantly they were true to God. Their obedience revealed that their hearts were tender for the gospel.

2 Corinthians 7:13-16: Paul's Confidence in the Corinthians

Paul writes, "for this reason we have been comforted;" because the Corinthians displayed genuine repentance for their actions and demonstrated love toward Paul, because the Corinthians have proven that Paul's confidence in them was not in vain, because Titus has experienced first hand the love, the affection, the obedience, the respect, the sorrow, the desire to change, the full affect of hearts that are open wide to Paul, but more importantly to the gospel. At this particular point in Paul's letter, we see a relationship between the church planter and the church that has been fully reconciled and healed. Paul ends this section of 2 Corinthians as he began, with a declaration in v. 4 of his boasting confidence in the Corinthians.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS
2 CORINTHIANS 7:2-16

Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-4

2 Corinthians 7:2-4

² Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. ³ I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. ⁴ Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.

- 1. How would you characterize Paul's attitude toward the Corinthians?**

- 2. Have you experienced this depth of transparency from pastors, teachers, or other Christians in your own life? What kind of effect (or lack of effect) has it had?**

- 3. Knowing that Paul is speaking of his confidence toward the Corinthians, when there were still some issues to be settled, what do you think is the basis of Paul's confidence?**

- 4. Do you feel like God has confidence in you, that He boasts on your behalf, even when your life does not look the way you think it should?**

Read 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

2 Corinthians 7:5-7

⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; ⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:1-4

2 Corinthians 2:1-4

But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again. ² For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made

sorrowful? ³ This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all. ⁴ For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.

5. Why do you think Paul was so troubled waiting for Titus?

6. According to Paul, what was the point of Paul's "sorrowful letter"?

7. Have you ever had an experience where you were corrected or confronted in such a loving way? What was its result in your life?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-12

2 Corinthians 7:8-12

⁸ For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it-- for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while-- ⁹ I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. ¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. ¹¹ For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. ¹² So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.

Read Genesis 27:30-38

Genesis 27:30-38

³⁰ Now it came about, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had hardly gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that **Esau** his brother came in from his hunting. ³¹ Then he also made savory food, and brought it to his father; and he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me." ³² Isaac his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, **Esau.**" ³³ Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, "Who was he then that hunted game and brought it to me, so that I ate of all of it before you came, and blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed." ³⁴ When **Esau** heard the words of his father, he

cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!" ³⁵ And he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and has taken away your blessing." ³⁶ Then he said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" ³⁷ But Isaac replied to **Esau**, "Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?" ³⁸ **Esau** said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." So **Esau** lifted his voice and wept.

Read Hebrews 12:17

Hebrews 12:17

¹⁷ For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

8. What are the qualities of wordly repentance?

9. What are the qualities of godly repentance?

10. How do you know which one a person is expressing?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:13-16

2 Corinthians 7:13-16

¹³ For this reason we have been comforted. 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.

11. Do you think that the report given to Paul by Titus is sufficient to warrant Paul's confidence in the Corinthians?