

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Repentance That Leads To Salvation

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2 Corinthians 7:2-16

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 7:2; that's on page 967 in your pew Bibles. Let me remind you of the story that lies behind this particular passage. You will remember from our walk through 1 Corinthians that there was a man in Corinth who was living in gross sexual immorality. He was being treated as a member of the church despite that he was having an adulterous affair with his step-mother. The Corinthians were proud of their open attitude on matters of sexuality and Paul writes to them in very strong terms demanding that they practice church discipline.

Now, it seems that following that letter which we call 1 Corinthians, Paul visited them in person to ensure that they followed through on his instructions. That visit did not go very well at all. There was a showdown between Paul and the supporters of this particular individual. These people rejected Paul's authority and resisted his efforts to ensure a process of church discipline. The church was immediately paralyzed. When there are two strong leaders or two strong factions in a church that are equally convinced and equally confident as to what the right course of action should be it can be absolutely debilitating to a congregation. Paul saw that and so he decided to withdraw so as not to precipitate a church split. He was not retreating or surrendering, but he was allowing for a period of de-escalation. From a distance he writes what scholars refer to as "The Severe Letter". Essentially he gives them an ultimatum: do the discipline or stop calling

yourself a Christian church and he sends Titus to deliver the letter. I'm sure Titus was not terribly pleased to be given this assignment, but he went and he gave the letter and now he has returned to report the outcome of the entire matter to the Apostle Paul. He reports to Paul that they have responded very well and that the church as a whole gathered up their courage and they did the required church discipline. They excommunicated either the original adulterer or his defender or both – that part remains unclear – and it seems that the person under discipline has repented and requested restoration. You will remember that in chapter 2 of 2 Corinthians Paul says that they must now turn and forgive that brother and restore him to fellowship and membership within the church.

Now, Titus has also reported that they have been entertaining some false teachers and so Paul has said quite a bit about that in the previous chapters but now he comes back to the immediate issue of their response to the Severe Letter and he summarizes what he perceives to be the definitive evidence of their saving repentance.

This is a wonderful passage and a very useful passage for both corporate and personal self-examination. We'll read the whole section from verses 2-16 but we will focus in on Paul's description of saving repentance in verses 10-11. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

² Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. ³ 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. ⁴ 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.

⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, ⁷ 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. ⁸ 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. ⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

¹¹ 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. ¹² 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.

¹³ Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. ¹⁶ I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you. (2 Corinthians 7:2–16 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Paul is feeling very happy in this passage – there is a mood of celebration. Having examined the evidence of their repentance he feels confident that they are in a good position before God. Now ultimately Paul is not the judge – but his job as a pastor is to prepare them to stand before the judge. And now, having looked at the fruit as reported by Titus, he is confident of their good standing. I love that! I love what that says about the task of pastoral ministry; there is a sermon in here for pastors and elders about what it means to be a shepherd of God’s flock but that isn’t the sermon that we should preach this morning; that sermon would be very interest to 14 people and so this morning we’ll stick to the very heart of the matter in this text. We will look at what Paul says about how real repentance manifests in the lives of truly saved men and women. Look again at verses 10-11:

¹⁰For **godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret**, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹For 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. (2 Corinthians 7:10–11 ESV)

You can tell when a person has really turned from themselves or from their idols and has embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. You can’t see the moment of salvation – Jesus says that when the Spirit blows into a human heart to make it new its like the wind blowing – you can’t SEE IT but you can observe its effect. That’s what Paul is talking about here. Something happens in a human heart at the moment of conversion. There is a love for Christ and a hatred for sin at the centre of it all. Its like we wake up and we see the world in a whole new way. Things that used to be beautiful now seem hateful, things that used to be repugnant now seem like life itself. Its like you’ve been born again and it’s a whole new world now. You can’t actually see that happen Paul says, that happens way down deep in a human heart but you can see the evidence of that happening and I see evidence of that in you. That’s what this is about, Paul talks about the things that he SEES that testify to their saving repentance.

Negative Evidence:

He begins by mentioning something he doesn’t see and he is glad that he doesn’t see it. If you are trying to prove a person innocent of murder then you are glad when you DON’T SEE a murder

weapon with their prints on it – that’s negative evidence and Paul starts with that. He says that he is glad that he doesn’t see:

1. A shallow and superficial sadness over sin

In verse 10 he talks about a worldly grief that produces death. One commentator describes what Paul is talking about here as a shallow remorse, unaccompanied by positive action¹. You’ve seen this before. A person comes to the front after service and they are obviously very upset, very concerned, very emotional about something that is happening in their life. They have lost a job perhaps, or a relationship has soured because of a certain sin that they have been clinging to. They love the sin but they are sad because the sin keeps producing death and ruin in their life. They ask you to pray about that and of course you do but you understand that until this person HATES the sin and LOVES the Savior then things will never change. And they don’t.

Real repentance isn’t like that. Paul says, and I see no evidence that your repentance is like that. Your repentance looks like the real deal to me – it looks like a repentance that leads to salvation with no regrets. Praise the Lord! And then he lists 7 pieces of evidence that argue convincingly for the reality of their repentance. He mentions first of all:

Positive Evidence Of Saving Repentance:

1. Their earnestness

As I go through this list I will use the words as they are translated in the ESV. Paul uses some strange Greek words in this list – some of them are not used anywhere else in the New Testament – and so they might sound a bit strange at first but I think as we go through them and define them you will understand quite easily what Paul is getting at. The first bit of evidence he remarks upon has to do with their earnestness.

The massive Greek dictionary² that I have on my shelf defines this particular word as “a

¹ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle To The Corinthians* in *The New International Commentary On The New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 377.

² All the definitions cited here are from the “BDAG” Greek-English Dictionary.

swiftness of movement or action”. Paul is saying that their swift move towards real action in this situation is proof of their saving repentance. Specifically it seems that Paul is referring to the fact that once they read Paul’s ultimatum and they understood what was really at stake they immediately took real and tangible action. They did the church discipline that was required. Real repentance isn’t just about FEELING REALLY BAD its about TAKING POSITIVE ACTION. That’s important.

The second thing Paul mentions is:

2. Their eagerness to clear themselves

The Greek word Paul uses is *apologian* from which we get our English words “apology” and “apologetics”. It has to do with making a defense and used in this sense it seems to indicate a desire to be seen as in the right. When the Corinthians were convinced by the severe letter that they were in the wrong they immediately demonstrated a concern to be in the right. They wanted to prove or demonstrate their righteousness. Remember that Paul is never claiming to be the judge here – they don’t have to prove themselves to Paul, rather as Paul says in verse 12 all of this is about being right IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. Really saved people are aware that God is always watching. Really saved people have a healthy fear of judgment and a desire not just to be right in their heart but to APPEAR RIGHT in the sight of God.

Let me give you a picture of this so that you know what I’m talking about. Do you remember the story of Zacchaeus? He was a tax collector and he had made himself rich at the expense of other people but when he meets Jesus he is eager to DEMONSTRATE his change of heart. The Bible says:

⁸Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.”¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:8–10 ESV)

Zacchaeus STOOD and said to the Lord – BEHOLD!! Zacchaeus wanted Jesus to SEE how he was doing things right. “Look Jesus! I’m giving back what I stole. I’m paying fourfold reparation! I am a changed man Lord!” That’s what Paul is talking about here! A really saved

person wants to SHOW the Lord that they are a new person. There is an eagerness to PRODUCE FRUIT in keeping with repentance. Paul sees that and commends them for it.

Thirdly, Paul mentions:

3. Their indignation

When you read that in English it doesn't make a great deal of sense. Why would Paul commend them on being indignant? To be indignant means to be upset or offended – why would that be a good thing? Well, it depends on what upsets you. In the Bible what offends you reveals the state of your heart. For example, in Matthew 21:15 we read:

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant (Matthew 21:15 ESV)

The chief priests and scribes did not have a right relationship with Jesus therefore they were offended by the praises that were being given him by the children. Similarly, when Mary anointed Jesus with very expensive perfume the Bible says:

when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, “Why this waste? (Matthew 26:8 ESV)

They didn't understand, so they were wrongly offended. But being offended is not always bad – Jesus got offended, however he got offended at the right things. Mark 10:14 says:

¹³ And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, **he was indignant** and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:13–14 ESV)

Jesus was OFFENDED that the disciples would try and keep away women and children from being blessed by him – that UPSET HIM because he understood their worth and he understood his own identity and calling.

What we are offended by reveals a great deal about us. As does what we are not offended by. It is amazing what Christians can laugh at and it is distressing what we can tolerate without

offense.³ What **BOTHERS YOU** reveals a great deal about you. Once the Corinthians were made aware of the reality of their situation they were immediately **INDIGNANT**. They were bothered that such sin had been defended in their midst, they were **BOTHERED** that their beloved Apostle had been so rudely treated – the whole mess made them **ANGRY** – and so it should have Paul says. You are rightly bothered and that is proof that your heart has been changed.

Fourthly Paul mentions:

4. Their fear

Again that sounds a bit to us but just like you want to be offended by the right things as a Christian, so also you want to **FEAR** the right things. Jesus said that, he said:

do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28 ESV)

Real Christians understand that God is holy and God is Sovereign and he will judge and that awareness settles on them and it changes what they fear. What people think about you or whether people will make fun of you or whether people will persecute you all the sudden becomes far less important than what the Sovereign God of the Universe thinks about you. The Corinthians had obviously been intimidated by this rebellious individual or faction that opposed the Apostle Paul but once they were made aware of their situation their fear of offending God became far more compelling than their fear of lesser parties. A real Christian knows who to fear and Paul commends them for fearing as they should.

Fifthly, he mentions:

5. Their longing

This word is only used here in 2 Corinthians 7 – Paul uses it in verse 7 and again in verse 11 and it is never used again anywhere else in the New Testament. There is a similar word that is used once in the Greek Old Testament in Ezekiel 23:11 and it is mentioned in the dictionary as a

³ Blessed are those who mourn

reference point so I will read it to you. Ezekiel 23:11 says:

“Her sister Oholibah saw this, and she became more corrupt than her sister in her **lust** and in her whoring, which was worse than that of her sister. (Ezekiel 23:11 ESV)

Obviously that is a bad longing. Just like there are wrong offences and wrong fears so too there are wrong longings and one of the signs that you are truly converted is that you begin to manifest **RIGHT LONGINGS** and **TRANSFORMED DESIRES** – that is what Paul is saying here. I suspect he used this word here as a subtle reminder of the original situation which created the problem in the first place. There was a man in Corinth having sex with his step mother – that is **WRONG DESIRE**. That is sinful lust. Real Christians don't tolerate that in their hearts and they don't permit that in their membership. Real Christians learn to foster **GOOD DESIRES**, real Christians begin to manifest **HEALTHY LONGINGS** and they work hard to crucify the sinful flesh.

Sixthly, Paul summons as evidence of their real repentance:

6. Their zeal

My dictionary defines this word as meaning “to be stirred up emotionally, to be excited/on fire”. Obviously it refers right passions and enthusiasm. A Christian is revealed as truly saved and converted by their new passions and enthusiasms – if I may be so bold, let me suggest that there are passions and enthusiasms that seem to belong more to the unconverted state than to the converted state. I am a little uneasy when I see a man who professes to be a Christian and yet can only talk about golf or hunting or cars. Now, let me be very clear, I am not saying that you cannot golf, or hunt or play with cars and be a Christian – I am saying that if that is your **PASSION** – if that is your identity and **OBSESSION** and chief **ENTHUSIASM** then I question your conversion. Real Christians have hobbies but they do not have **OBSESSIONS** apart from the worship and service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lastly, Paul speaks favourable about:

7. Their punishment

Of all the words used in verse 11 this one is easily the most jarring isn't it. What earnestness, what eagerness, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what PUNISHMENT. He is referring of course to the actual excommunication of the offending brother. They did what they were told to do. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:

⁴When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus,⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 5:4–5 ESV)

He gave them a direct order: kick the brother out! At first they were paralyzed by the opposition of that other faction, but then once Titus delivered the ultimatum in the severe letter, they did what they were told. They excommunicated the brother. Their willingness to do that is the final piece of evidence summoned as proof of their right standing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Doing the right thing does not make you a Christian – that isn't what Paul says. But doing the right thing even when the right thing is terrifying – that SHOWS that you are a Christian. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness – that happened, the Bible says in Genesis 15. In Genesis 15 Abraham was saved by faith in God. But do you remember what happened in Genesis 22, 7 chapters later? God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on the altar. He told him to do something horrible and hard. Doing it – or being willing to do it – didn't make Abraham saved – he was already saved. It didn't MAKE Abraham saved but it did SHOW Abraham saved. Abraham SHOWED his faith by what he did, that's what James 2 is saying and that's what this is saying.

Being willing to do hard and horrible things because they are right and because sin is serious and because God is holy – that willingness, that courage, that determination and that follow through ultimately is taken here as the final and definitive evidence that this church really is a Gospel believing church. They have their problems and God isn't finished with them yet – but they are on the right track. They are rooted in the grace of God and they are bearing fruit in keeping with repentance.

Application:

There are a variety of appropriate applications for this passage. As a pastor and an elder in this church I see some applications in this for me. But I want to end with a more general and universal application. Paul does that at the very end of the letter. He says:

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! (2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV)

“Your church as a whole is on the right track”, Paul says, “but what about you?” Is Christ in you? Test yourself. Use these 7 evidences and TEST YOURSELF. Are you in Christ? Is Christ in you? If he is then there should be evidence of new attitudes, new actions, new fears, new offenses, new passions, new inclinations and new desires. Do you see these things? Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith.

The goal here is not doubt; its not guilt; its not fear – the goal is JOY and PEACE and CONFIDENCE before the Lord. The Apostle John wrote about these things to his churches and in his letter he said:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13 ESV)

The goal in self-examination is assurance of saving faith. You want to KNOW that God has begun a good work in you. You are not looking for perfection – the Corinthians were still messed up - you are looking for fruit; you are looking for evidence of repentance unto life. So examine yourselves and deal with what you see. Do you see fruit in keeping with repentance? Then partner with it. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. Behold the glory of the Lord and be changed by one degree to the next into the same image as Jesus Christ.

But if you don't see it, then deal with it. Don't hide, don't deny - deal with it. If there is no evidence of salvation in your life then repent – right now, cry out to the Lord for the gift of repentance and faith. Ask him to soften your heart and to teach you how to love Christ and how to hate sin. Ask him to open your eyes, ask him to unstop your ears so that you could see Christ, hear his Word and be saved. And I am sure of this:

that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6 ESV)

You will be who God has saved you to be. God always finishes what he starts. He is the author and the finisher of our faith. He is the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end. I know this and you can know this because this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

Pastor Jody will you come and lead us in a time of reflection and response?