

2 Corinthians 7:2-16  
Proverbs 9  
Psalm 111

“Godly Grief Produces Repentance”

May 8, 2016

When we started this section of 2 Corinthians, we read Proverbs 9 and sang Psalm 111.  
We will do so once more!

Proverbs 1-9 lays out the two ways – the two paths – the two women –  
Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly.

Sing Psalm 111  
Read 2 Corinthians 7:2-16

We finally come to the conclusion of the central section of 2 Corinthians.

In chapter 2, verse 12,  
Paul had said “When I came to Troas...my spirit was not at rest  
because I did not find my brother Titus there.  
So I took leave of them and went to Macedonia.”

And then Paul launched into his defense of his ministry –  
a defense that went on for four chapters (chapters 3-6),  
as Paul has set forth the character and content of Christian ministry.

The content is essentially the same as you find in all of Paul’s letters,  
but due to the conflict that they have had with Corinth,  
2 Corinthians is the place where we see most clearly  
how leadership in the church is to be patterned after the cross.  
God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.  
And now God makes his appeal to you *through us* –  
as the pattern of Christian ministry is demonstrated  
from Christ to us to you.

This is *not* the pattern of the Levitical priesthood.

The Levitical priesthood entered the holy places *instead of you*.  
Think back to chapter 3 –  
where Paul contrasts the Mosaic covenant with the new covenant in Christ.  
Because of the work of the Holy Spirit,  
“we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,  
are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.  
For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (3:18)

The pattern of Christian ministry is found in the cross of Jesus.  
Jesus suffered and passed through affliction to glory.  
Therefore we – the ministers of a new covenant –  
“are afflicted in every way, but not crushed...  
always carrying in the body the death of Jesus,

so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.” (4:10)  
And as your pastors and elders and deacons model this,  
that same pattern is to characterize your life as well.

The first point that we need to see today is that being in each other’s hearts  
will mean affliction, comfort, and joy!

**1. Affliction, Comfort, and Joy – What It Means to Be “in Our Hearts” (v2-7)**  
**a. The Character of Gospel Ministry**

<sup>2</sup> *Make room in your hearts<sup>[b]</sup> for us.*

What does Paul mean: “make room for us”?

One commentator puts it this way:

“they need to close down the ‘border crossings’ of their hearts  
transversed by the false teachers,  
the interlopers contaminating their spiritual lives,  
and at the same time open up the heart boundaries  
that are keeping them from a free and open relationship  
with Paul and his fellow workers.” (Guthrie, 361)

Paul has just warned against being unequally yoked with unbelievers.  
Paul has just urged the Corinthians to be *separate* from Babylon –  
from the unbelief and idolatry of their culture.

As Augustine put it:

“If you believe, hope, and love otherwise [than the pagans],  
then live otherwise and gain approval for your distinctive faith, hope, and charity  
by distinctive actions.” (quoted in Guthrie, 364)

How can we “cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit,  
bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God”? (7:1)

Paul points the way in verse 2.

“Make room for us.”

The ESV adds “in your hearts” – which is fine.

Don’t make room in your hearts – in your lives – for the corruption of this age.

Rather make room for us – for those who both proclaim and live the good news of Jesus.

What do you make room for in your life?

What things do you give priority to?

Paul is warning us against having the same priorities as our culture.

Take a look at how you use time.

How much time do you spend on sports? Movies? Computer games? Social media?

How much time do you spend together with the people of God,  
seeking to follow him, love him, serve him?

What you make room for in your life will reflect what really matters to you.

And then Paul goes back again to describe the character of their ministry at Corinth:

*We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.* <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.* <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.*

Notice the way that Paul shifts from the first-person plural (“we”) into the first-person singular.

The shift highlights the importance of the plural.

Paul shifts into the singular in order to comment on the integrity of the group.

*We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.*

Paul is not claiming that they are sinless.

Rather, Paul is describing the general character of their ministry.

Indeed, I would be willing to make the same claim for the eldership at MCPC over the last 14 years.

Sure, we’ve made our share of mistakes – particularly with sins of omission – failing to do things that we should have done –

but when people have brought complaints to the session,  
we have sought to make it right.

And Paul returns to the language of affliction and comfort

(where he started in 2 Corinthians 1 – and scattered throughout chapters 2-6).

And he reminds them of what he said in 3:2 –

“You yourselves are our letter of recommendation,  
written on our hearts,  
to be known and read by all.

And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us,  
written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God,  
not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

Now he says, in effect, “Hey, please don’t take this wrong!

I’m not writing this to condemn you – but to restore you.

“For as I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.”

This is what it means to be the body of Christ together in this age!

To die together and to live together.

In that order!

It’s *not* that we live together and then we die together.

Rather, we die together – carrying about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus –  
so that we might live together in him.

And so Paul says that all of this struggle and affliction is a reason for joy and comfort!

*I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort.*

We need to be open and frank with one another.

Some people think that “open and honest” is a license for being nasty.

“I’m just being honest” – for some people – is a way to cloak their fears,  
and pretend that they are being open –  
when in fact, they are closed off to *anyone else* being open!

Paul is acting with great boldness – he is speaking very openly –  
in a way that seeks to draw the Corinthians into this open relationship.

Of course, this is very different from the modern notion of being “open-minded.”

The modern notion of “openness” means that anything and everything is okay –  
except being closed minded!

It’s really striking to see how Paul handles conflict.

He is an apostle.

In theory that means that he could simply command them – and they must obey.

But Paul understands that authority does not work like that –  
at least not Christ-like authority.

Yes, Paul will praise the Corinthians’ obedience at the end of our passage today,  
but you don’t produce obedience by being heavy-handed.

*In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.*

You could translate the last line of v4 as:

“In all of our troubles, I am ecstatic with joy” (Guthrie)

While Paul has had to confront the Corinthians with the problems,  
he also wants to encourage them.

And, as we have seen repeatedly through 2 Corinthians,

Paul understands that the only way to glory – the only way to joy –  
is through the path of suffering, sorrow, and affliction.

#### **b. Paul’s Singular Joy**

<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.*

“Working with people in the cause of Christ has tremendous rewards, with great joy,  
but it can be accompanied by great occupational hazards such as stress,  
discouragement, and even depression.

For as Christian ministers

we not only carry the weight of our own spiritual struggles and failures  
but [we] also work with spiritually dysfunctional people

who at times kick against us as we try to lead them toward growth.”  
(Guthrie, 373)

But even as the afflictions manifest themselves both without and within –  
so also the comforts and joys!

And he points to the coming of Titus as the reason for his comfort and joy:

*<sup>6</sup> But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, <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.*

In the midst of all of Paul’s ordinary afflictions and suffering,  
his deepest affliction was his concern over the Corinthian church.  
Would the Corinthians abandon Christ and give themselves over to defilement of body and spirit?  
Would they forsake Christ for idols?  
Would they follow false teachers and compromise with the world?  
Would they join themselves to Babylon?

And so Paul says that the coming of Titus brought comfort.  
I’m sure that you have experienced this.  
When you are discouraged – when you are afflicted by trials –  
the coming of a friend brings comfort.  
Simply the *presence* of someone you love – who loves you –  
brings comfort in distress.  
But how much more does that coming bring comfort,  
when that friend brings the very news that you have been longing to hear!

But Titus came with the news that Paul had longed to hear!  
Why was Paul so nervous?  
Because he had sent Titus with a “severe letter” –  
a reprimand (which seems to be lost).

And Paul appears to have briefly regretted sending the letter –  
what if it didn’t work?

## **2. Grief, Regret, and Joy – Why Godly Grief Is a Good Thing (v8-13)**

### **a. Paul’s Letter and the Corinthians’ Grief (v8-9)**

*<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.*

Have you ever done that?  
You wrote something – thinking that it was the right thing to do –  
and then after you send it, you question yourself:  
what if it has the wrong effect?!

<sup>9</sup> *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.*

Does it sound to you as though Paul was basically guessing?

He hoped that he had calculated correctly –  
and now he rejoices to learn that he was right!

Take heart!

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, didn't always know what to do!  
He guessed.  
And this time, at least, he was right!

Sometimes it is a good thing to cause grief!

Because sometimes it requires a rebuke to bring people to repentance!  
And Paul explains the difference between godly grief and worldly grief in verses 10-12.

### **b. Godly Grief vs. Worldly Grief (v10-12)**

<sup>10</sup> *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

What is the difference between godly grief and worldly grief?

John Chrysostom says it well:

“Worldly sorrow...is regret for the loss of money, reputation, and friends.  
That kind of sorrow merely leads to greater harm,  
because the regret is often a prelude to a thirst for revenge.  
Only sorrow for sin is really profitable.” (quoted in Guthrie, 379)

Think about Proverbs 9:7-8 –

“Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse,  
and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.  
Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you;  
reprove a wise man, and he will love you.”

How do you respond when someone rebukes you?

Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

And particularly, look at verse 11 for a description of what this looks like:

<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!*

Paul uses seven words to describe the Corinthians' godly response:

Earnestness – haste – being eager to deal with the problem.  
But also they defended themselves – being eager “to clear yourselves.”  
This is the word “apologia” – where we get our word “apology.”  
This word refers to the idea of defending yourself.

An apology is a defense of your actions.  
When you apologize, you are explaining yourself.  
Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't see you standing there.  
I'm sorry, I was reading a book and I lost track of time.  
Those are apologies.  
If you tell your child, "Apologize to your sister,"  
you are telling your child to explain their reasons why they did something.

And Paul says here that apologies can be a good thing!  
Even when you realize that you have sinned,  
you may still need to offer an apology!  
You may need to say, "Yes, I was wrong – I sinned against you –  
And here's the context to help you understand what happened."

Paul does not give us all the details of what the Corinthians said to him –  
but plainly he was satisfied by the combination of *repentance* and *apology*  
that he received.

The third word – what indignation – is a much stronger word.  
It can refer to displeasure, annoyance, anger, even rage.  
The object of their indignation is not clear.  
Possibly they are enraged at the false teachers.  
Maybe they are upset at themselves for their own blindness.  
But godly sorrow will produce indignation in you.  
Godly sorrow will produce *strong emotions* in you!

The fourth word – what fear – shows how the Corinthians have realized the severity  
of what they have done.

In v15 Paul will speak of the "fear and trembling" with which they received Titus.  
Why does the wise man love the one who rebukes him?  
Because the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom!  
Why is this person rebuking me?  
If this person is rebuking me out of love –  
then maybe I've missed something –  
maybe I need to hear what this person is saying.

The fifth word, "what longing" – is the same word used in verse 7 –  
where Titus told Paul of their longing for him.

And this is closely related to the sixth word – "what zeal" –  
which speaks of their enthusiasm for Paul –  
reflecting their dedication to the gospel and to Paul himself.

The final word "what punishment" focuses on the outcome:  
The word could be translated "what vengeance" or "what retaliation."  
It has to do with the dispensing of justice.

We saw back in 2:6 that Paul spoke  
of how the punishment inflicted by the majority was sufficient.  
And since chapter 2 and chapter 7 function as bookends of this section,  
we should see that Paul is satisfied  
by the Corinthians' response to his severe letter.

And so, at the end of verse 11, Paul says:  
*At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.*

They *were* guilty.  
That's why Paul wrote the severe letter!  
But now they are innocent!

How can the guilty become innocent?  
By repentance!  
And by *bearing fruit in keeping with repentance!*

So how do you demonstrate godly sorrow?  
Well, when someone shows you your sin,  
you should respond with earnestness – promptly dealing with the sin –  
you should respond with an apology – explaining the situation  
(not to excuse yourself – but to clear yourself  
by specifying exactly what has happened);  
and you should respond with indignation, fear, longing, zeal –  
real emotions that express your concern that this sin be dealt with! –  
and with “punishment” – with proper consequences  
that will demonstrate fruit in keeping with repentance.

That is what produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret.

Anything less than that leads to death.

And Paul says that this earnestness – this eagerness and haste to clear themselves –  
was really the chief point of his letter.

<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.*

I want you to think about this.  
What is the purpose of church discipline?  
We often think that the purpose of discipline is to reclaim the sinner.  
Paul says “it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong”  
We often think that the purpose of discipline is make things right.  
Paul says “it was not for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong.”



The point of church discipline is *not* primarily about the sinner.  
The point of church discipline is *not* primarily about justice for the one who was wronged.

Rather, the point of Paul's letter was

“In order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.”

Paul is saying that church discipline is not really about the individual.

It is about the community.

God says that he will make his dwelling among them –

and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (6:16).

If God is going to dwell in our midst,

then we need to be really serious – very earnest – before God  
about our dealings with one another.

That's why we sometimes say that church discipline is about *the honor of Christ*.

And that's why Paul says in verse 13:

<sup>13</sup> *Therefore we are comforted.*

Paul uses the same word “comfort” that he used in chapter 1

to speak of how we are comforted in the midst of afflictions.

### **3. Refreshment and Joy Through Obedience (v13-16)**

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

Here we are given a glimpse into another member of Paul's traveling presbytery.

Titus.

Would you have liked Titus's job?

His task is to take Paul's severe letter to Corinth –

read it to the church in Corinth –

and deal with the fallout!!

Practically, this would mean *first* reading it to the leadership in Corinth.

(And remember that according to 1 Corinthians,

there were several parties and factions in the church at Corinth –

and while they *may* have reunited after 1 Corinthians,

they would still be rebuilding the fractured relationships.)

It would appear that Titus had his own doubts about the Corinthians,

because Paul wound up “boasting” to Titus about the Corinthians –

apparently something along the lines of,

“Don't worry, Titus, they won't kill the messenger!”

But now Titus returns, *refreshed* by the Corinthians.

As it turns out – not only has Paul been truthful and open in his words *to* the Corinthians, he has also been right in his words *about* the Corinthians.

And the result for Titus has been quite encouraging (v15):

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

Titus had arrived – the young colleague of Paul –  
perhaps little more than an intern at this point –  
a young minister handling one of his first pastoral assignments.

But the Corinthians received him “with fear and trembling” –  
and he recounted to Paul their “obedience” –  
as they responded to Paul’s letter with godly sorrow  
that led to repentance.

I want you to think about the situation the Corinthians were in.  
They were facing the fresh-faced intern – Titus –  
who carried a severe letter from Paul.  
How easy it would have been to say, “Oh sure, he sends his little intern!  
If he wants to talk to us, let him show up in person!”

But the Corinthians humbled themselves.  
They did not respond with haughty pride.  
They recognized that Titus – together with Paul – was an ambassador for Christ.

Paul has set forth the character and content of the Christian ministry –  
and now he praises the Corinthians for responding properly to that ministry.

How should you respond to your ministers?  
You are called to obey.

I don’t make a big deal about this – because it always feels awkward to say it out loud!  
But you are called to *obey* your elders –  
to obey those who teach the word of God to you.

It is not a blind obedience – it is obedience *in the Lord* –  
but it is obedience none the less.

Martin Bucer has some wise words on the subject of obedience.

He was a pastor in 16<sup>th</sup> century Strasburg.

He says,

“because we are all too fond of ourselves,  
we are not able to recognize or judge our own deeds properly.  
Therefore, if we do not have a good and high opinion  
of those whom the Lord has placed over us,  
and who are to instruct, exhort, admonish, and correct us on his behalf,  
and do not immediately receive their words and teaching,  
then we will get nowhere and will not progress in the pursuit of godliness,  
as is our current and daily experience.” (p203)

How do you know what you don't know?

How can you see your blind spots?

You can't!

That's why we need one another!

A wise man knows that he has blind spots –  
and therefore relies on others to point them out to him!