

2 Corinthians 7 (Part 2): 2-16 – Repentance

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2 Corinthians chapter 7, we are picking it up in verse 2. Follow along with me as I read verse 2 and following:

“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.” (ESV)

Let's pray. Holy Spirit, teach us today from the ministry of Your words speak to us. Guide us. Help us to understand what's going on here and what you want to teach us. Help us to learn. We yield our hearts to You today. For it's in Christ's name we pray, amen.

Last week we covered just one verse, here we are covering a lot. But you'll remember that we spoke in verse 1 of this chapter, I should say, Paul spoke. We looked at it, but he made this incredible statement in verse 1 of this chapter. You'll remember what it was? Bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. We talked about what that meant. If you missed last week the message is on our website, you can catch up there but again, talking about bringing holiness. We talked about what holiness is, what it isn't and so forth. Bringing holiness to completion through the fear of God or in the fear of God.

Now here, beginning in verse 2, through the rest of the chapter, Paul writes to the Corinthians, and he begins to speak to them about the joy, and you can hear it in his writing, the joy that now fills his heart at understanding that the Corinthians have done just that. They have been bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God, and you'll remember last week we talked about the essence of holiness.

It's bound up in the idea of separation, and we'll, again, you can go back and listen to that to get more about it but just to bring you into the whole conversation here once again, Paul had been hearing about issues going on there in the church of Corinth. Sin issues, bad stuff that was happening in the church, so he originally made plans to come and visit them and his intention was to confront them and confrontation is never fun, right?

I mean there are some people who would rather literally face the pains of death than deal with confrontation. Confrontation is never a fun sort of a thing. And I don't think Paul was necessarily worried about it, but he did decide rather than going to Corinth and confronting the people in person, to write them a letter, confronting them with the information so that they could have time to get their issue put together and then when he came physically, he could rejoice with them because they had responded properly.

So, he made this decision to write them a letter, and it was a very difficult letter to write. In fact, Paul described the process of writing that letter this way. Listen to this, *“out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears.”* Have you ever written such a letter? Well, that was what that letter was to Paul. And he wasn't being dramatic here. He wasn't using dramatic language to try to

pump this thing up and make them feel bad. He genuinely hated writing that letter, and even though he knew that it had to be done, so, there you go.

I think we can, again, we can probably all relate to a situation where you have had to confront someone, whether in person or by letter and you hated doing it. I mean, who likes to sit down with somebody and say, bad form, and you need to really clean up your act. That's never fun, because instantly, they have the potential of turning on you, and accusing you of self-righteousness, and who are you to this and that, and the other thing, and it's pretty difficult.

Paul wrote the letter that he did, completely not knowing how these people were going to respond, because people can, I mean, people can respond all kinds of different ways, right? I mean, just good grief, go back and read First and Second Kings and learn how many times God sent His prophets to confront the nation of Israel and how the myriad of ways that the people of Israel responded to His prophets over the years.

Sometimes repenting, sometimes killing the prophet, or in Jeremiah's case, dropping him into a dry well and lowering bread and water occasionally, or something like that. Paul struggled not knowing how these people were going to respond to this very, very terse letter that he wrote. And here was the additional problem. He sent Titus with the letter.

He said, here, Titus. He had to be the bearer of this letter. How fun would that be? Well, then Titus was delayed in coming back to meet them and to give him the word of how the Corinthian church had responded, and so, it really affected Paul's ability to minister where they were ministering. He was waiting for Titus at Troas and listen to what he says again. We go back to the second chapter. I'll put this up on the screen for you. Because back in second Corinthians two, he wrote to them and he said,

2 Corinthians 2:12-13 (ESV)

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I didn't find my brother Titus there. I took leave of them and I went on to Macedonia.

When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, my spirit was not at rest because I didn't find my brother Titus there. (so, he says) I took leave of them and I went on to Macedonia.

In other words, I finally decided I just got to go. I got to see if I can meet up with Titus. So, he says, here I was in Troas, and God had really opened some pretty cool doors of ministry, but I just couldn't stay because I was, my, I was in knots. My heart was just in knots, wondering how you guys were going to respond to this letter that I had written.

Again, Paul goes, as he says there, into Macedonia in search of Titus, hoping to find him there, and eventually, the two meet up, and Titus delivers to Paul the news that his letter was very well received among the people of Corinth, at least among the majority of the people. And Paul talked about that here in the text that we were reading. Look with me again in your Bible, beginning in verse 5. Here in, in your, in chapter 7, he says,

“For even when we came into Macedonia, (where Paul went to meet up with Titus he says) our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without (in other words, there were issues with us sharing the gospel, but there were also) and fear within.”

Paul is admitting to these people that he was fearful about their response. His heart was really unsettled, so he goes on to say in verse 6, *“But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus.”* (In other words, they met up with Titus eventually. He says) ⁷ *“and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you...”*

In other words, instead of rejecting Paul, his message, and Titus as the message bearer, they comforted Titus, they encouraged him, and he begins to tell them there at the end of verse 7 of how Titus reflected or referred to their longing, their mourning and so forth. Or as the NIV puts it, he says your, deep sorrow. He told me of your deep sorrow.

That must have meant more to Paul than anything that Titus said. When Titus talked about the Corinthians deep sorrow, he was so incredibly relieved that now he was free to admit to them that he actually regretted for a while even writing the letter. Have you ever done something where you confronted somebody and then you got a serious case of the regrets afterwards?

That's what he tells them here in verse 8. He says, even if my letter grieved you, I don't regret the fact that it did. Although I did, I'll be honest with you. I regretted it for a while. Now I don't regret it because you've responded well. But boy, there for a while, I was thinking to myself, Paul, what were you doing? I think you were kind of harsh. You know how we do, we second guess ourselves when we had to tell somebody something that they don't want to hear, and we're

kind of like, oh man! We always, we want to try to speak the truth in love, but we're not always real successful speaking the truth in love. Sometimes it comes out a little bit, tepid and it's just, it's not good.

But he explains, and I want you to look again here in verse nine, because he explains here why his earlier regret turned to joy. He says, *“as it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were, (look at this, look at this) grieved into repenting (and then he says this) for you felt a godly grief. It was a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through the things that we said.”*

Now I want to stop here for just a minute please, and I want to consider this morning what Paul is saying here when he speaks to these people about this grieved, this idea of being grieved into repenting or as the NIV and the New King James both say, your sorrow led you to repentance, however you say it. We see here that sorrow can be a good thing. That's an important reminder.

In this day and age, when people are running after happiness with a breakneck speed and we are reminded of something vitally important here, and this is important for those of us who have ever had to confront someone, or even those of us who have been confronted and been made sad by that confrontation. Sorrow has a very positive potential side to it, but not just any kind of sorrow.

Paul is very specific here. In verse 10 when he says, and look with me now in your Bible again, *“For godly grief (and by the way, the ESV uses the word grief, but I looked at most of the other modern translations use the word sorrow. They mean the same thing. I like sorrow better. So, let's go with sorrow, shall we? For godly sorrow) “produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, (look at there) whereas (here's the contrast) worldly (sorrow) grief produces death.”*

See, usually we don't look at sorrow or grief, kind of like this. We just see sorrow. We see somebody who is sorrowful. But don't you love the insights that we get from this? We've we learn from this passage that there's two different kinds of sorrow. Now, the sin might be exactly the same. The people might even be very, very, similar.

The apparent outward expression of their sorrow might be pretty similar at least at the outset, but Paul says there are very different kinds of sorrow, and this is something that you and I would do very well to pay attention to.

So, let me put on the screen here for you, this kind of a little graph if you will, an explanation of these different kinds of sorrow, Godly and worldly.

S O R R O W

GODLY

Godly sorrow produces a change of mind and heart along with a willingness to change one's behavior. When coupled with faith in God, godly sorrow leads to salvation and leaves no regret.

WORLDLY

Worldly sorrow does not progress beyond remorse. There are deep regrets over what has happened, but there is no accompanying change of mind and heart, nor any willingness to change, nor any faith in God. The result is death.

First of all, Godly sorrow, let's define it here. Godly sorrow produces a change of mind and heart. along with a willingness to change one's behavior, and when coupled with faith in God, Godly sorrow leads to salvation, and it leaves no regret.

Whereas, on the other side, Worldly sorrow does not progress beyond remorse. There are deep regrets over what has happened, but there's no accompanying change of mind and heart, nor any willingness to change, nor any faith in God. The result is death. Right? So, notice that the key between these two, and they're very different responses, are they not, I mean, when you stop and think about it.

Now, again, I want to just remind you on the outside, worldly sorrow and Godly sorrow look very much alike, and I might look at somebody who's displaying worldly sorrow, and I might even be encouraged for a minute thinking that perhaps there's some real genuine stuff going on here, but later on we find out that's not the case.

What makes the difference? Well, it all comes down to one word, and it's found in verse 10. Look with me again in your Bible. Verse 10, "*for godly grief (or sorrow) produces (there it is guys) repentance.*" Underline it, highlight it, write it on your neighbor's palm of their hand, whatever. Just remember that word because that is the key.

The difference between Godly sorrow and worldly sorrow is repentance. There's all kinds of tears. There's all kinds of carrying on, on both sides, but only on one

side is there repentance, and that is the difference in a nutshell. So, if repentance is the issue, then we would do good to remind ourselves about the definition of repentance. So, let's put it up on the screen, so that we can see it together. What is repentance? Should be the next one, Jane. Right there.

Greek Word: μετάνοια Transliterated Word: metanoia Definition: change of mind, repentance

It's the Greek word, metanoia, and the definition is, a change of mind. And obviously the change of mind assumes, at the same time, a course correction, because that's what follows a change of mind. And it all centers around that idea of changing one's mind. It's a willingness to turn around and go that way, where I've been going this way, right?

You see, again, if you don't get it, that godly sorrow involves a change of mind, that's where we mistake worldly sorrow for something that looks very good, but there's no good in it, and Paul says it leads to death. Again, because there's no change of mind. Now, there might be, now that we've refreshed ourselves on the meaning of this idea of repentance, it might be a good idea to refresh ourselves in the understanding of what it means in practical terms.

So, I decided, I wanted to look up in my Bible any place where Jesus talked about real repentance. You know, I consider Jesus an authority, I hope you do too. And I figure, if Jesus talks about somebody repenting, they probably really repented. Right? So, I actually found a passage, let me show you this, from Matthew chapter 12. He spoke of the men of Nineveh saying that they were actually going to rise up against in, at the judgment, against the people of the generation that heard him.

<u>Mathew 12:41 (ESV)</u>

<i>“The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah...”</i>
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“The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah...”

There in Judea and Galilee and so forth, and they were going to condemn that generation. Why? For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and they didn't repent. These people that Jesus was talking to didn't repent when He came and spoke to them and basically Jesus was saying to them and someone greater than Jonah is here.

And they repented at Jonah. Jonah was kind of a dingbat. I mean, he was kind of an interesting sort of a character, thinking he could run from God, hide from God, and even when God, he hated the Ninevites, and that's why he didn't want to go to Nineveh and preach to them a message of repentance, because he was afraid that they might just repent. That is the truth. He was concerned that they might just actually repent, and then what happens?

Then God's going to go and forgive them, and he wanted to see those people die, and so that's why he ran away in the first place. Well, anyway, so he was a little bit of a loose cannon and yet when he went and preached to the Ninevites they repented. I mean, man did they repent. Let me show you this from Jonah, chapter 3.

Jonah 3:6-8 (ESV)

“The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.”

The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, (takes off his robe) covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published (it all) through Nineveh, (and he said this) “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. (and look at this, look at this. Here’s repentance) Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.”

That's great. You see why Jesus used that as an example of repentance because, and these people genuinely repented because God did turn from His wrath. You'll remember that what Jonah's message was essentially, as he walked through the city, he said repent or die and that's a little bit of a paraphrase, but he even gave him a time frame and they responded with genuine repentance. But I want to remind you of what that genuine repentance is, and it's really in that last line of that statement from the king.

“Let everyone turn from his evil way and the violence that is in his hand.” Now, that was genuine repentance. Do you ever stop to think about how the people would have responded if it had been worldly sorrow? How would they have

responded? See, sometimes we just think they would have responded by saying, Get out of here! That's not worldly sorrow, that's rejection. That's rebellion.

Worldly sorrow would have still included a lot of crying, a lot of wailing and carrying on, but no change. You get it? No, so you see, somebody can, when they're caught, confronted or whatever, they can just, they can break down and go, you're right, I'm really sorry and they can just, tears, just gushing and, oh, I'm such a, idiot, why did I do this and all this, and that's worldly sorrow.

Nothing Godly about it until they take the step to say, "I'm going to turn to God, and I'm going to begin to change. I'm going to turn my back," and this is the critical element that must be there for repentance to be repentance. Repentance is not just tears. So, as we go back to chapter 7 here now in your Bible, I want you to notice how Paul describes the repentance of the Corinthian church. Look with me beginning in verse 11 in your Bible there. He says,

"For see what earnestness this godly grief (or sorrow) has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, (I assume that's indignation toward the sin and the stuff that had gone on) what fear, (and I'm assuming that's fear of God) what longing, (what longing to be restored) what zeal, (that's the energy, the desire to walk with God and be real), what punishment! (I'm not even sure what, we're getting just one side of a letter here, I don't know exactly even what he means, we don't know what he means by punishment, but apparently, it may have something to do with withdrawing from a particular individual in the church who had been involved in some kind of sin. But notice he goes on at the end of this verse to say) At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter."

By repentance, he said, by repentance, you have proved yourself, to be acquitted in that real sense. So, here's his conclusion, verse 12, look with me there. He says, *"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(Look, he says, here's why I wrote, here's why I wrote) ...but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God."*

That's why I did this. That your earnestness, the genuineness, and Paul had confidence that these people were going to do this, but he says, I wanted you to see it yourself, and that's why I did this. And so, he says in verse 13, *"Therefore we are comforted..."* In fact, we're doubly comforted because Titus came back and told us how much you comforted him. He went there to confront you, and you comforted him.

And so, he ends the chapter, and I know I haven't covered every single verse here, but he ends the chapter by saying in verse 16, *"I rejoice because I have complete confidence in you."* See, Paul was so convinced by the genuineness of their repentance, and this is the key. He says that I have complete confidence in you. When you see repentance, that's real, and I've seen it over the years and I'm sure you have too.

I've also seen the opposite of real repentance. I've seen that worldly thing where there's a lot of sorrow, a lot of crying, a lot of tears, a lot of regret, but no change. I've seen that too. When you see the real genuine article. You're like, wow! God is doing a work here. There's a confidence that God is doing a work here, right? And I look at this individual and I'm like, thank you, Jesus. There is such a genuine work of Your Spirit going on in their life. I know this person is not going to be able to help but grow.

They're not going to be able to help but to start to just grow up in their faith and knowledge and understanding and strength and this is going to be huge in their lives. I want to wrap up this, with another passage from the Old Testament that you're probably familiar with, I dare say, but it is an important statement made mostly by the Lord. Joel, the prophet, pops in here at the very end of this quote but let me put this up for you. Joel chapter 2, beginning of verse 12. Listen to this,

Joel 2:12-13 (ESV)

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...."

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; (that's repentance) and rend (or tear if you will) your hearts and not your garments." (And then Joel adds in) Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love..."

I love this statement in the prophecy of Joel because it once again speaks of something that may look very much on the outside like genuine repentance, but in fact is not. And you and I don't go around tearing our clothes when we feel something sorrowful in our hearts, but they did back in those days. It was a common expression of grief. We don't have many of these expressions anymore. Some of them, I'm really glad we don't have like sprinkling dust on your head and wearing sackcloth.

That doesn't sound fun in the slightest, but one of the other things they would do is literally take hold of their clothes and rip them. Tear them, and it was a very dramatic sort of an expression, of just, Grrrrrrrrrr! You know, it probably felt really good when you think about it. Wouldn't it have been horrible if you were weak like me, and you're like...you can't, Somebody come and rip these for me, please, or something.

It just came into my head of somebody going, they just couldn't rip them. Mom sewed this thing a little too good. But he says here, rend your heart, not your garment. Okay? The idea behind that is, don't get caught up in some of those external expressions, and think that by that, God is pleased. Oh, He saw every tear, and this and that.

No, He's really most interested in the condition of our hearts, and so he says, rather than ripping your clothes, how about ripping your heart? As David spoke of his own sin and repentance, he said, I'd bring an offering, but I know that's not what you're looking for. I know what you're looking for. You're looking for a broken heart. A broken and contrite heart. That's what you're looking for and that, oh Lord, David said, you will not despise.

It's the genuine article, the real willingness to change. Now, let me wrap this up by saying one very important thing, and this is extremely important that you hear it. God is not looking to you to affect the change. He's looking for you to have the willingness to turn to Him with all of your heart. God knows something about you and me. He knows that we cannot change by ourselves. In other words, the flesh, me, cannot defeat me.

It's going to be a stalemate. In fact, my, it's just going to be the flesh. So, there must be a work of God in the midst of it. We come to God with an open, broken and contrite heart. Guys, He does the rest. He picks up the pieces. He begins to restore our lives. He gives us the ability to will and to act according to His good purpose. But it starts with that heart, that genuine heart that is broken and wants to change. Repentance is a crazy thing.

I've told you guys before about a time in my life when I was a brand new believer and I was not, I was finding it very difficult to throw off the old Paul, very difficult. And in fact, I don't want to give you the impression that that job is completely finished, but there were some really major stuff going on in my life as a new believer. And the Lord was so gracious at some point in my life to reveal what my sin had done to Him, and that may sound like a really strange thing.

And it was just, it was really crazy, but I was driving along down the highway all by myself, and the Lord gave me this momentary, He gave me this picture of what my sin had done to Him. How I, and I never, ever, never even entered my mind, my sin affecting God? Are you joking? He's God, after all. But then I remembered some really interesting statements in the Scripture. Like, when Jesus met Saul, Paul, on the road to Damascus, the first thing that Paul asked was, "*Who are you, Lord?*" And the Lord said, "*I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting.*" (Acts 9:5)

And that really hit me because I realized that Paul was persecuting Jesus. He thought he was just trying to go after Christians, but he was actually going after the Lord. And the Lord was affected by it all. How exactly? And then I started looking at other passages about how we can grieve the Holy Spirit.

Like, wow, that sounds like affecting some, His heart, I mean, to grieve the Holy Spirit is, sounds real. And here I am, driving along, I've been engaged in this sin that I just could not break free from in my life. And the Lord just gave me this instant picture, and it's not words, but just this thing, this instant understanding of how my sin had affected Him, and I lost it. I lost it.

I not only began to cry, I began to sob uncontrollably, and I'm surprised, I was such an idiot, I didn't even pull off to the side of the road, but I just, I couldn't breathe, because I was sobbing. And all I could say is, I am so sorry, so sorry what I've done to you. It was just this, and I mean, talk about repentance. I never went back. Praise God. I never went back to that area of sin in my life after what God showed me.

As we're praying for people who are caught in sin, let's pray. Let's pray that God would show them what's really going on so that their hearts would be broken. Because you know what, a broken heart, a broken and contrite heart, God will not despise. That's what He's looking for, amen.