

Title of Series: "In Defense of Truth"

THEME: "The Comfort and Joy of Sorrow" #14

Passage: II Corinthians 7:4-16

Last Week: "The Right Choice in Life" 6:11—7:3

- The Motivation of Paul's Plea 6:11-13; 7:2,3
- The Nature of Paul's Plea 6:14a, 17,18; 7:1
- The Rationale of Paul's Plea 6:14-16

Introduction:

Optimistic and encouraged are words that seem strange coming from the Apostle Paul, especially after writing such a letter of censorship to the Corinthian church.

However, from this passage we find some form of the word "comfort" occurs **seven** times in our text while "joy," "joyful" or "rejoice" occurs **six** times. But the occasion for both of these emotions here is **sorrow**, a word which is found in some form (either as a verb or a noun) **eight** times, and is directly related to both "comfort" and "joy" in the context of this passage. What possible connection could sorrow have with comfort and joy?

In spite of the ongoing opposition to Paul's ministry by those whom the apostle referred to as "super-apostles" (11:5; 12:11, ESV), he was "exceedingly joyful" in spite of

all his "tribulations," v4. In v5-16 he explains how his joyful comfort is related to sorrow.

At one point during his troubled relationship with the church in Corinth, Paul "faced conflict from every direction," v5, and, as a result, he was depressed. "Downcast," v6, *tapeinos*, means "lowly in spirit," "depressed." The reason for his depression was his anxiety over how the Corinthians might have received the letter of rebuke he had written and which Titus was to deliver (2 Corinthians 2:4). As David Garland observes, "Censure was never far from insult in Greek society." Yet, as Paul argued in First Corinthians, "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you*," (1 Corinthians 4:14).

Consider the reasons for Paul's "comfort and joy" in the midst of sorrow.

I. PAUL WAS COMFORTED WITH THE COMING OF TITUS V5-7

A. Note how v6 begins "Nevertheless God" – "But God." Paul's comfort came from God, because of two wonderful events. First, the safe arrival of Titus comforted Paul.

1. As his emissary, Paul feared how the Corinthians would receive Titus and his delayed return concerned Paul. Note 2 Corinthians 2:12-13; v5 actually resumes where 2:13 left off.

2. He might also have been anxious because of the many dangers of travel in that era; he was concerned for his safety.

B. Paul was further comforted by the report Titus brought (**v7**), who was himself comforted by the response of the Corinthians to the letter he carried. Note the emphatic “your.”

1. They evidenced an earnest desire, or “longing” to see Paul again.

2. They mourned because of the alienation that had been caused by some in their fellowship.

3. They wanted to do what they could to repair the relationship with Paul.

4. Their attitude caused Paul to rejoice even more, **v7**. Ref. **v4**, where Paul was “overflowing with joy,” (Greek, *hyperperisseuô*, to overflow beyond).

II. PAUL WAS JOYFUL OVER THE SORROW OF THE CORINTHIANS V8-12

A. While Paul at first regretted sending the “sorrowful letter,” he was now glad he sent it, **v8a**.

B. The sorrow the letter caused was only “for a while,” lit., “for an hour,” **v8b**.

C. Now he rejoiced at their sorrow because it led to their repentance, **v9a**, which kept them from losing rewards at the judgment seat of Christ, **v9b**. “Loss,” *zçmioô*, “to suffer loss, to forfeit;” same word used in **1 Corinthians 3:15**. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

John MacArthur, “Paul’s selfless love made him anxious not only that the Corinthians might experience God’s chastening and lose their present blessings, but also that they might forfeit their future rewards . . . The loss of blessings from Paul’s ministry would have resulted in the Corinthians accumulating valueless ‘wood, hay, [and] straw,’ fit only to be burned.”

D. True repentance is the result of “godly sorrow,” **v10**, in contrast to “the sorrow of the world,” which produces “death.”

1. Worldly sorrow is exemplified by Esau in the O.T. and Judas in the N.T. Note **Hebrews 12:16-17**, re: Esau. ^{ESV} Hebrews 12:16 that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

2. Such sorrow is self-centered and brings only self-pity, regret, bitterness, and finally despair. Ref. Judas.

E. The repentance evidenced by the Corinthians was the product of “good grief” and was manifested seven ways (**v11**). This is the classic passage on what true repentance looks like.

1. “Diligence,” *spoudḡ*, eagerness, enthusiasm, earnestness. They wanted to make things right.

2. “Clearing of” themselves. From *apologia*; “what a desire to clear yourselves.” (HCSB).

3. “Indignation;” - “anger aroused by something that is unjust.” They realized how wrong they had been to allow this attack against Paul to be tolerated.

4. “Fear” of the consequences of their behavior, including the loss of blessing and reward.

5. “Vehement desire,” *epipothḡsis* is the same word used in **v7** for “earnest desire.” They longed for things to be made right.

6. “Zeal,” as in **v7**. They were “on fire” to do the right thing.

7. “Vindication,” *ekdikḡsis*, vengeance, punishment, “justice.” NASB, “avenging of wrong.”

F. True repentance softens the heart and leads to both a desire and a determination to do the right thing despite the cost.

G. Their attitude had demonstrated that they were doing the right thing “in this matter,” **v11b**.

H. Note that Paul’s desire was not revenge but reconciliation, **v12**. Ref. **Romans 12:19**, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

III. PAUL SHARED THE COMFORT AND JOY OF OTHERS **V13-16**

A. When our “hearts are open,” we can see beyond ourselves!

B. Paul was comforted by the comfort the Corinthians experienced as the result of their repentance, **v13a**.

C. He rejoiced “exceedingly more” than before because of the joy Titus experienced at the response of the Corinthians to Paul’s censure, **v13b**.

1. “Knowing what happiness you gave to Titus by setting his mind at rest.” Imagine the anxiety Titus must have had about his mission!

2. Further, they had demonstrated the reason Paul had confidence in the reality of their faith in how they received him, **v14-15**.

D. Paul rejoiced that he could again have confidence regarding them in everything, **v16**.

Conclusion:

^{KJV} Matthew 5:4 Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

When we truly repent, our **spiritual integrity is restored!** Christians today could learn much from the Corinthians! We don't only repent when we get saved! Repentance, a change of both mind and will, resulting in a change in conduct, should be a continuing part of our Christian experience. Sin should be forsaken; relationships should be restored; forgiveness and doing the right thing should be "the order of the day" for God's children. Remember well the Proverb, ^{ESV} Proverbs 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. Paul not only has great hope for the Corinthians, he gives hope to them as well! You must shown the person the way back to full restoration with great confidence!

Further, we should be willing to confront other believers when they are doing wrong, in spite of the cost to us. We might keep them from loss at the judgment seat of Christ and their sorrow will be turned into joy.