

## THE CONFIDENCE OF SORROW 2 CORINTHIANS 7:2-8:9

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In this section of 2 Corinthians, having spent most of his time dealing with negative problems in the church at Corinth, Paul began to express confidence and joy in the Corinthians to motivate them to faithful service.

### APPEAL, DENIAL AND AFFIRMATION (7:2-4)

Paul appealed to the Corinthians to have affection for him, and denied any wrongdoing that might have inhibited their affection. He also affirmed his love and confidence in them as the basis for their reciprocal affection.

**7:2.** As he had in 6:13, Paul asked the Corinthians to **make room for** him in their **hearts**. He did not want them to resent or reject him, but desired close fellowship with them like that between loving parents and children (compare 6:12-13).

Next, he dispelled any misgivings that may have hindered the Corinthians love for him. In their ministry, Paul and his company had **wronged no one**, had **corrupted no one**, and had **exploited no one**. It is likely that Titus (see 7:13b-15) had reported that some in the Corinthian church had accused Paul and his company of these things in order to discredit their ministry. Apparently, Paul feared that some still believed these lies.

Why had these accusations come against Paul? As a faithful Christian leader, Paul had addressed sins in the Corinthian church. His accusers had easily cast his sharp rebukes and warnings in a negative light, and Paul boldly denied all these accusations. To be sure, he had fallen short of perfection. Yet, he believed he had not seriously wronged anyone during his stay at Corinth (see Acts 18:11; 1 Cor. 9:18; 2 Cor. 2:1; 11:7; 12:17-18), or in his epistle to them. His motives had been pure, and the results of his ministry positive.

**7:3.** Paul shifted from the plural (**we** 7:1-2) to the singular (**I**) to express himself even more intimately and intensely than before as he made certain his denials were not misunderstood. He did **not say this to condemn** them – his denials were not contentious, and he intended no curse upon the church.

To clarify his motivation in denying the accusations, he reminded the Corinthians of

something he **had said before**. He returned to the plural pronoun (**we**) to include his entire company in these next statements. The Corinthians had such a special place **in** their **hearts** that he and his company **would live or die with** the Corinthians. Unfortunately, the NIV reverses the word order of the Greek text and gives the impression that Paul spoke only theoretically about what he was willing to do. Paul actually said he was ready “to die together and to live together” (NASB, NRSV, NKJV) with the Corinthians. This word order suggests that Paul spoke realistically of what he had already done. From his point of view, Paul was already dying as he suffered in ministry on behalf of the church (1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 4:11-12; 6:9). Also, he had already lived in Corinth (Acts 18:1,11). The Corinthians should have been fully aware of Paul’s deep commitment to them, confident he never would have abused them.

On the contrary, despite his sharp rebukes and warnings, Paul affirmed that his outlook for the majority of the church was very positive:

- 1) He had **great confidence** in them
- 2) He took **great pride** in them
- 3) He was **greatly encouraged** regarding them.

It is unlikely that Paul approved of every Corinthian church member, especially to this degree. Yet, Titus’ report (7:13b-15) led Paul to assess the congregation as a whole very positively.

Paul had **confidence** that most Corinthians were true believers who would willingly submit to God’s will; he believed they had proven faithful to Christ and would certainly inherit eternal life (1 Cor. 3:5; 15:1-2,11; 2 Cor. 1:24; 8:7). He had godly **pride** in their faithfulness. Just as he elsewhere admitted to a holy jealousy for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:2), Paul took pride as the Corinthian believers’ spiritual parent (2 Cor. 6:13; 7:14; 8:24; 9:3; compare 2 Thess. 1:4). He delighted in the progress of their Christian lives. This confidence and pride caused Paul to be **greatly encouraged** (“filled with comfort” NASB; “filled with consolation” NRSV). Paul found tremendous strength from God by reflecting on what had happened in the Corinthian church.

This encouragement was precious to Paul because he continued to have many **troubles** in his ministry (2 Cor. 1:3-11; 4:7-17; 6:4-5,8-10; 11:23-33; 12:7-10). Yet, he found **joy** with **no bounds** when he considered the spiritual condition of the believers in Corinth. He was beside himself with delight and pleasure.

### **REASON FOR JOYFUL CONFIDENCE (7:5-16)**

Paul explained the reason for his confidence and joy. Titus had just reported to Paul that the church at Corinth had accepted Paul’s instructions. This section relates the main theme of Titus’ report (7:5-7,13b-16), but is interrupted by a reflection on the repentance that had taken place in Corinth (7:8-13a).

### **Paul's Comfort in Macedonia (7:5-7)**

**7:5.** Paul had sent Titus to Corinth to deliver his earlier epistle (2:3-4) and to collect money for believers in Jerusalem (8:6,19-21). When Paul did not find Titus in Troas, he journeyed to **Macedonia** to visit the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (2:12-13). Titus pursued Paul to **Macedonia** and finally brought him a report on the church at Corinth.

While Paul waited for Titus he **had no rest**. He and his company were in turmoil, **harassed at every turn**. They faced two problems: **conflicts on the outside** and **fears within**. These **conflicts** (*mache*) were probably experienced with believers as well as unbelievers. Nearly everywhere Paul went, he faced opposition (Acts 9:22-26; 13:8,45,50; 14:2-6,19; 15:36-41; 16:16-24; 18:5-6,12-17; 19:23-41; 20:3; 21:20-22,27-36; 23:12). We cannot be sure what kinds of **fears** the apostle had in mind. He could have suffered fears because of the challenges to his ministry, but it is more likely that he spoke here of his fears or doubts about the Corinthians. Paul had been deeply concerned about how they would react to the harsh epistle that Titus delivered.

**7:6.** In the midst of this troubled condition, **God comforted** Paul and his company **by the coming of Titus**. In a quick aside, the apostle described God as the God **who comforts the downcast**. This description of God derived from the Old Testament (e.g. 1 Sam. 2:8; Pss. 25:16-18; 31:9-24; Isa. 49:13), which describes God as one who cares for those who have been troubled by enemies. Similar expressions appear earlier in this epistle (2 Cor 1:3,4). Paul recognized that Titus' good report was not a mere human event. God himself had intervened to care for Paul.

**7:7.** Paul had feared that the Corinthians resented him because of his sharp rebukes, but Titus told Paul that the Corinthians were **longing for** him. They had **deep sorrow** over their waywardness (see 7:8-13a), and were **ardent[ly] concern for** Paul. We gain a sense of how important these responses were to Paul by noting how he repeated the pronoun "**your**" three times in rapid succession. He was deeply moved because his desire for the Corinthians' love was fulfilled (6:11-13; 7:2). As a result, his **joy was greater than ever** — Paul could not remember a happier time.

Paul wrote in very personal terms at this point, but the larger context reveals that he did not merely enjoy the personal attention that the Corinthians gave him. Their loyalty and concern for him proved both their acceptance of his apostolic correction, and their loyalty to Christ himself (see 8:9). Paul delighted in the grace of God at work in the Corinthian church.

### **True Repentance (7:8-13a)**

Paul was also confident and joyous over the Corinthians because the sorrow he had inflicted on them had brought the Corinthians to repentance through godly sorrow.

**7:8-9.** Paul knew that his earlier letter delivered by Titus had **caused ... sorrow** in

the church, and Paul had mixed feelings about this. On the one hand he **did not regret it**, but on the other hand he **did regret it**. Just as parents do not enjoy disciplining their children, Paul did not enjoy the **sorrow** he brought to the Corinthians. He did not enjoy seeing them in pain. Yet, he knew that this sorrow was **only for a little while**, and that it had **led ... to their repentance**. For this reason, he could also be **happy** that they had gone through the sorrow. Paul's goal had been to bring the Corinthians to repentance, and his strategy had worked for their great benefit. They had reacted **as God intended and so were not harmed in any way**.

**7:10.** To explain himself further, Paul contrasted two kinds of sorrow: 1) **Godly sorrow**, which conforms to divine intent (see 7:9); and 2) **worldly sorrow**, which does not.

**Godly sorrow ... brings repentance.** In this context, "sorrow" refers to regret and emotional pain, and "repentance" to a deep-seated change of mind and behavior. When believers become aware of their sins, they often react with bitter sorrow. But they do not repent unless they change their lifestyles. **Godly sorrow** always leads to **repentance**. When true believers hear the rebuke of God's Word they turn to God for cleansing and forgiveness. Thus, **godly sorrow ... leads to salvation and leaves no regret**.

On the surface **worldly sorrow** may look very similar to **godly sorrow**, but worldly sorrow **brings death**. The outcome of sorrow indicates its true nature. Even unbelievers may bitterly regret sins that they have committed, but this sorrow does not bring about God-centered repentance, and thus leads to **death**.

**7:11.** Paul delightedly reflected further on the Corinthians' repentance by noting eight results their **godly sorrow** had **produced**:

- 1) **Earnestness** or sincerity
- 2) **Eagerness to clear yourselves** ("vindication of yourselves" NASB), i.e. a readiness to make amends
- 3) **Indignation**, i.e. repulsion from former practices
- 4) **Alarm** ("fear" NASB), i.e. trepidation over past sin
- 5) **Longing**, i.e. deep desire to for the ways of righteousness
- 6) **Concern** ("zeal" NASB), i.e. caring about the terrible conditions of their church
- 7) **Readiness to see justice done** ("avenging of wrong" NASB), i.e. a commitment to doing what was right in the church
- 8) Evidence that they were **innocent in this matter**. Paul may have had in mind the case of immorality which he had addressed in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. Although the church had hesitated at first to discipline the immoral brother, perhaps they had not failed to discipline him at the apostle's instruction (compare 2 Cor. 2:1-6).

This list of evidences for repentance is to some degree tailored to the situation in Corinth. The first five or six items are easily applied to other circumstances, but the last two deal with the particular sins in the Corinthian church.

**7:12.** Paul explained his motivation in bringing sorrow to the Corinthians in legal terms. He had not been concerned primarily with **the one who did the wrong** or with **the injured party**. While he may have had in mind the case of incest that he previously addressed (1 Cor. 5:1-13), he may also have had a more generic outlook in mind. In any case, Paul had not chiefly intended to blame or defend anyone – his goal had been much more positive. He had wanted the Corinthians to **see for themselves how devoted** they were to the ways of Christ. He had wanted them to experience the joy of seeing God at work in their lives. This divine grace displayed itself in their godly sorrow and thorough repentance.

**7:13a.** The positive reactions and results which God worked through the Corinthians were so dramatic that Paul simply could not doubt them (see 7:5). Upon reflection, **all this ... encouraged** the apostle's entire company.

#### **Paul's Added Encouragement (7:13b-16)**

As Paul continued to describe what had happened in Macedonia, he commended the Corinthians even further.

**7:13b.** Not only had they encouraged him, but they had also encouraged Titus. Paul was **delighted to see how happy Titus was**. Titus was Paul's trusted servant and like Paul certainly suffered much for the gospel. For this reason, Paul was pleased by Titus' happiness. Titus had **been refreshed** by the Corinthians' reaction.

**7:14.** The impression the Corinthians made on Titus also delighted Paul because he had **boasted** about the Corinthians to Titus. On a number of occasions, Paul rejoiced in the work of God in others' lives by drawing attention to their gifts and blessings. In all likelihood, Paul had told Titus about the blessings of God at Corinth in a manner similar to his acclamations to the Corinthians themselves (1 Cor. 1:4-9; 11:2).

Because Paul had bragged to Titus about the church at Corinth, he had risked embarrassment by sending Titus to deal with troubles there. He feared that perhaps they would not respond properly to his letter, and that Titus would not be so impressed with the church. But the Corinthians they had been filled with godly sorrow and had repented, so that they had **not embarrassed** him. Thus, Paul was fully vindicated in his **boasting ... to Titus**.

**7:15.** Paul rounded out his commendation of the Corinthians by noting that Titus and he were so pleased with the church because they **were all obedient**. Paul had given many instructions in the letter that Titus delivered, and the Corinthians had obeyed in everything. It is not likely that Paul meant that every single individual complied. "**All**" in this context probably identified the vast majority, or the church as a

whole.

Besides this, Paul remarked on the attitudes of the Corinthians toward Titus. They had not resented his presence, but had received him **with fear and trembling**. The precise meaning of this expression is not altogether clear. Paul used “**fear and trembling**” four times in his epistles (1 Cor. 2:3; 2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5; Phil 2:12). The expression appears to have been quite flexible, its meaning depending on the circumstances it described. In some cases it may simply have meant intense, humble anticipation of a future task. In others it may have entailed a fear of divine judgment. The Corinthians received Paul’s rebukes and warnings with humble awareness of the peril in which their sins placed them (1 Cor. 5:6-8; 9:24-27; 10:1-12,22; 11:30-32).

As a result of their compliance and emotional reaction, Paul had **complete confidence** in the Corinthians. He was sure that their faith was genuine, and that they could be trusted to respond appropriately to the Word of God. Although he often called the Corinthian church “brothers” (1 Cor. 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,20,26,39; 15:1,31,50,58; 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:8; 8:1; 13:11), Paul also expressed doubts about their eternal salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-2; 2 Cor. 13:5). Still, his confidence in the church at large had increased to the point that he had **complete confidence** in them.

## **MOVING FORWARD WITH POSITIVE MOTIVATIONS (8:1-9)**

Paul turned his attention to the collection of the contribution for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Close topical similarities exist between chapters 7 and 8: Macedonia (7:5; 8:1); Titus (7:6,13,14; 8:6,16,23); and the positive qualities of the Corinthians (7:4,7,11,12,13; 8:2,4,7,8,16,17). These connections indicate that chapter 8 is the apostle’s application of his new confidence in the Corinthians. Paul dealt with a serious moral responsibility, but his new confidence in the Corinthians deeply influenced how he instructed them. Instead of rebuking and warning them, Paul emphasized positive motivations for obedience to the will of God.

His discussion of this matter extends from 8:1-9:15, but at this point we will comment only on 8:1-9.

### **The Example of Macedonia (8:1-7)**

**8:1.** Paul encouraged the Corinthians to move forward in their renewed commitment by following the example of the Macedonians (i.e. the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea [Acts 16:12-40; 17:1-12]). In a spirit of intimacy, he addressed the Corinthians as **brothers** (1 Cor. 1:10,11,26; 2:1; 3:1; 4:6; 7:24,29; 10:1; 11:33; 12:1; 14:6,20,26,39; 15:1,31,50,58; 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:8; 8:1; 13:11). Paul and his company wanted the church at Corinth to be encouraged to action by **the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches**.

**8:2.** How did God's grace display itself in Macedonia? The churches in that region had demonstrated **rich generosity** by giving generously to the relief of poor believers in Jerusalem (8:3-5). This generosity was obviously an act of divine grace because it occurred during a time of **severe trial**. On several occasions we read about troubles suffered by the Macedonian churches (Acts 17:1-9; 1 Thess. 2:14; 3:3-4; 2 Thess. 1:4). By comparison, the church at Corinth had probably not experienced much trouble. Even so, the Macedonians gave with **overflowing joy** even in **their extreme poverty**. Their example should have motivated the Corinthians to give generously as well.

**8:3-5.** Paul supported (**for**) his report of Macedonian generosity with his personal testimony about several details. He knew the Macedonians had given **as much as they were able**. In fact, they had given **beyond their ability**. More importantly, they had done this **entirely on their own**, without harsh rebuke or strong commands. They had even **urgently pleaded** for the privilege of giving. In exemplary behavior, the Macedonians not only **gave themselves first to the Lord**, but also to Paul and his company **in keeping with God's will**.

**8:6-7.** Paul was obviously very pleased with the generosity of the Macedonian believers, but he mentioned these matters primarily to motivate the Corinthians to show the same voluntary generosity. For this reason, Paul **urged Titus** to return to Corinth to complete **this act of grace on the Corinthians' part**. The Corinthians had already experienced many blessings from God. As he had acknowledged before, Paul admitted that they excelled **in faith, in speech, in knowledge** (compare 1 Cor. 1:5; 8:1; 12:8-10; 2 Cor. 1:24). Yet, he wanted to see them go beyond these experiences of God's grace. Out of **complete earnestness** ("utmost eagerness" NRSV; "all diligence" NKJV), or full sincerity and devotion (compare 2 Cor. 7:11,12; 8:7,8,16), and **love** for Paul and his company, they were also to **excel in this grace of giving**.

Paul's strategy was plain. He first affirmed that through God's grace the Corinthians excelled in many areas of Christian living. Then he encouraged them to perform with the same excellence as they collected the donation for the church in Jerusalem. He spoke of giving in this way because he desired voluntary and generous contributions. It is easy for Christian financial responsibilities to be reduced to mere duty, but Paul chose his words carefully here to portray this matter in a positive light. He hoped the Corinthians would see the opportunity to help the Jerusalem believers as a mercy from God. Such positive motivations should lie behind every obedience offered by maturing and spiritually minded believers.

### **A Test of Sincerity (8:8-9)**

Rather than requiring contributions, Paul sought generous and voluntary gifts for the poor in Jerusalem in order to test the Corinthian Christian's sincerity.

**8:8.** Paul continued positively by strongly denying that he was **commanding** the Corinthians to give. If they merely responded to an order or threat from him, then their giving would be duty and not an **act of grace** (8:6). At the same time, he admitted that

his encouragement was **to test the sincerity of their love**. It is difficult to determine the object of this **love**. Paul may have had in mind their love for him (6:12,13; 8:7), their love for the believers in Jerusalem, or their love for Christ (1 Cor. 16:22). The last option seems best in light of the immediate connection in the next verse (8:9) and the comparison with the Macedonians who **gave themselves first to the Lord** (8:5). In all events, Paul sought to test the depths of the Corinthians' love and to encourage them to demonstrate that love **by comparing it with the earnestness of others** (i.e. the Macedonians [8:1-5; 9:2-4]).

**8:9.** Paul supported (**for**) his call for demonstrating sincere love by reminding his readers of the sacrificial love of Christ. The Corinthians knew (**you know**) that Christ **was rich** in his pre-incarnate state. As the second person of the Trinity, Christ was exalted over all before the humiliation of his incarnation (compare Phil. 2:5-8). Despite his eternal riches, Christ **became poor** when he came into the world so that believers **through his poverty might become rich**. Christ's humiliation culminated in his death on the cross (Phil. 2:8), and through his death came the riches of salvation (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:14-21).

It is important to remember Paul's perspective on the wealth of salvation in Christ. Believers do not become **rich** through the sacrifice of Christ in the sense that they necessarily receive physical wealth in this life. According to Paul, in this life our wealth is in the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He is the **deposit guaranteeing our inheritance** (Eph. 1:14). Yet, as Paul told the Corinthians elsewhere, in Christ all believers will inherit all the riches of the new world when Christ returns in glory (1 Cor. 3:21-22; 4:8; 2 Cor. 6:10).

The Corinthians were to be motivated by the example of Christ's love and generosity to give selflessly to the poor in Jerusalem. Their response to this opportunity tested the sincerity of their love and appreciation for Christ.

## DIGGING DEEPER

### A. Pride (7:4)

The Greek word *kauchesis*, here translated "pride," and its verbal form *kauchomai* may carry either positive or negative connotations, much like the English word "proud" (as opposed to "prideful" which is always negative). Christians may rightly take pride in God, and in his works and laws (Rom. 2:17; 2:23; 15:17; 1 Cor. 1:31; 15:31; 2 Cor. 10:17; Gal. 6:14; James 1:9). They may also take pride in their own true merit (1 Cor. 9:15; 2 Cor. 1:12; 11:10,17; Gal 6:4; Phil. 2:16) or in that of others (2 Cor. 5:12; 7:4,14; 8:24; 9:3; Phil. 1:26; 1 Thess. 2:19). Christians may not take pride in themselves for things for which they do not deserve credit (1 Cor. 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 9:16). At times, pride may even be neutral, as in merely relating favorable truths (2 Cor. 11:30; 12:1).

### B. Joy (7:4)

In Paul's writings, "joy" (*chara*) appears rather frequently, and usually relates to the coming of the kingdom of God and the work associated with it (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 1:24; 2 Cor. 2:3; 7:4,13; 8:2; Gal. 5:22; Phil. 1:4,25; 2:29; 4:1; Col. 1:11; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:19-20; 3:9; Philem. 1:7). It is especially the feeling one has upon receiving that for which one hoped (Rom. 15:13; Phil. 1:4; 2:2; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 2 Tim. 1:4). In the continuation of the kingdom prior Christ's second coming, the promised blessings are realized in part, but not in full. Christians hope for those portions that have not been realized, and rejoice over those that have been realized.

## ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Describe Paul's relationship with the Corinthians on a personal level. Why had Paul been worried about this relationship? How was Paul reassured regarding this relationship?
2. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow? How can the same emotion in response to the same situation be either worldly or godly?
3. Why was Paul so interested in testing the Corinthians in this passage (7:11; 8:8)? How what about the Corinthians actions made or would make these actions acceptable? In what ways do you need to be tested? In what ways is it inappropriate for Christians to subject themselves to testing?
4. What is encouragement? Why is encouragement important? What is the relationship between the Corinthians encouragement of Paul and Paul's encouragement of the Corinthians?
5. Why did Paul raise the example of the Macedonian churches? How would this example have made you feel if you had been a Corinthian Christian receiving this letter? How would it have encouraged or discouraged you from responding to Paul appropriately? How might 1 Corinthians 1-4 form a significant backdrop for the people who received this letter?
6. What should Christians think, feel and do when they hear of other Christians who are impoverished? List several other obligations Christians have toward one another whether or not they even know each other, and suggest ways in which Christ's example supports your list.
7. What do you suppose motivated the Corinthians not to complete the work they had begun? Or, why had Paul's encouragement become necessary? How was the completion of this work a work of grace? How does giving build up the giver? Why didn't Paul command the Corinthians to collect the donation?

8. How does this passage relate to the whole argument of Paul's letter? How does it depend on the preceding material? How does later material depend on it?