

2 Corinthians 7 Commentary-Wayne Barber

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2 Corinthians 7:1-5 The Requirements of Right Relationships

A new sound as we enter another chapter tonight, 2 Corinthians 7. We're going to be looking at verses 1-5, and we've started a new little series as we push our way through this book. And this particular series is on the Importance of Right Relationships. Hasn't it been awesome to watch what God has put together all the way through? The God of all comfort, when your walk matches your talk, all the different things we've seen up until now. But now we're talking the importance of right relationships. This is part 2 tonight. We're going to be talking about the requirements of right relationships. Last week we talked about the recipe, what goes into it to make them right. But tonight we're going to talk about what's required. If we're going to walk in right relationships what are the requirements of a right relationship?

Isn't it interesting—and I ask this truly in wonder—how that wrong doctrine, which produces wrong thinking, which in turn produces wrong living, how that divides the body of Christ? You know, it even causes us to become suspicious of our true brothers that we walked with before. When you start thinking wrong you start living wrong and it immediately affects that relationship. It doesn't seem to matter where the wrong thinking, the wrong doctrine comes from. It could come from false teachers who live unaccountable to nobody but themselves. It could come from them. It could come from the humanistic doctrine of this world which we, all of us have to deal with every time you turn your television set on, you're being bombarded with it. Or, whether it could have, it could come from just rumor that flows out of the mouths of poisonous people. But when a believer who's walking in tune with God and walking in tune with his brother embraces something that's wrong, a wrong doctrine, wrong information, immediately his relationships with his fellow believers becomes ruined. It's over because they cannot walk together.

The psalmist said in Psalm 133:1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity." Boy, that's a beautiful verse there. But it's impossible when there is wrong doctrine being believed. It's incredible how this disturbs the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ. Years ago when I was in youth work, I was working in Mississippi, associate pastor there in charge of the youth. We had a wonderful group and I lost about half of them when we got started, then God began to bring the ones that were hungry for the Word and God did a special work there.

But we had one young man that was probably the leader of the group. You know how you always have that leader amongst others. You have equals, but you have always that unequal above among equals, he just stood out. I depended on him. I counted on him. He was at my house half the time. It was amazing how this young man was growing in the Lord and how the relationships of the whole group seemed to even focus with him and his leadership. And one day he fell into some wrong doctrine. Got into a Bible study group through his parents and whatever happened, he got into wrong doctrine. One of the first things I could have told you he was in something wrong because there was no fellowship. There was no unity when I was around. Have you ever noticed that? All of a sudden, that which was there before that was unspeakable and untouchable really, but God was doing it, was gone.

Christmas came that year and he came over to my house and had a gift for me and I liked that. If anybody wants to give me a gift I always take it. I'm still a little kid at Christmas time, every year, even to this day. And when he came up there with a gift and I opened it and it was a shirt. It was one of those big wide striped ones, old sick green, and this sick color of yellow, but back in that day it was supposed to be pretty and it fit me. That's the big thing. He shopped to find this shirt, double extra large tall. Man, it was right. You all write that down. It was just right. And I thanked him for it and, I mean, I was just tickled to death.

We walked out on my front porch and he turned and tears were in his eyes. I thought he was just so overjoyed at giving me a gift. And he said, "Oh, Wayne, if you could just have the second baptism, God could really use you." And I said "What?" You know Ephesians tells me I've got every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. I don't need a second one. I've already got, I'm working on about the 93,000th one. But when he walked off my step I realized immediately he had bought it hook, line and sinker. And the fellowship between he and I had been broken. I didn't do anything. I just noticed it was gone.

This kid went from one thing to another to another always had to have an experience, always had to be emotional. Years went by, he left our group. I lost track of him as they moved out of town, him and his family. And one day I got a phone call, years later, from another fellow who was in the group. And he said "Wayne, you remember," and he gave the name. And I said, "Oh, man, yeah, whatever happened to him?" He said, "Well, I'm calling you to tell you. Yesterday, he was on his way down to New Orleans and he was killed. A truck pulled out in front of him and he was hit and just dead in a second." I said, "Awe man, that's so sad." He said, "No, Wayne, that's not what's sad." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "He was on his way to New Orleans to become the leader of the New Age movement of the Southern United States." They were going to induct him there. He was going to take that over.

He never was satisfied with Jesus. He always had to have something different. And as a result of that the relationships that were so close to him broke. Immediately they were disturbed by the wrong doctrine.

Now in Paul's case a very similar thing has happened. You see the rift between him and the Corinthians, and this has been a tough church for him, was on the account of the fact that they had chosen on their own to embrace the bad doctrine of false teachers that had plagued the city of Corinth. There was all kinds of stuff going on there and I haven't got time to go back to 1 Corinthians and teach that. I mean, it's rampant in that book. Suspicion, they began to become suspicious of Paul. Contempt for him, had a judgmental attitude towards Paul, even accusing him of not being an apostle. And these attitudes now because of wrong information had begun to surface between the two of them.

The apostle Paul, in trying his best to make that relationship right, bared his heart in 6:3-10 in an effort to counter the wrong information they had chosen to believe about him. He says in verse 11, "Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is open wide." He says "I have held nothing back. There's nothing that we've done in our behavior that is in any way brought discredit to the gospel." And he says the only restraint in the relationship that they had with one another was the unwillingness of the hard headed Corinthians who wouldn't turn loose of this false doctrine, this wrong information so that they could come back into that unity, that oneness that the Spirit would produce with them and Paul.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:12, "You're not restrained by us." There's not a thing in the world we have done or are doing that's causing any restraint on your side. But "you're restrained in your own affections." Boy, isn't that interesting? Just like in the book of the Revelation, the Ephesians, the church at Ephesus, the Ephesians hadn't lost their first love. I used to think that when I was trying to quote the verse. They didn't lose anything; they left their first love. You see, what's happened to the church at Corinth is their affections were no longer for the pure teaching of God's Word. Their affections were no longer for the purity of the things of God. But now they had shifted, to be sure, to the lure of the deceivers false teaching. Now they were restrained from being in oneness with Paul. They couldn't walk together. They weren't in agreement with one another because they weren't willing to give up the wrong doctrine that they had bought into.

Paul urges them to open up and deal with what was really hindering the relationship. And he knew what it was and they knew what it was. He's asking them to separate themselves from the poisonous people that were telling them all these lies about Paul. He warns them to never form a binding relationship with them and he's going to say separate yourself. He says in verse 14 through the first part of verse 16, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." Don't be unequally yoked as some translations say. "For what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

Now Paul doesn't say don't be around them. That's the evangelistic heartbeat all of us have when we're walking with God. What he says is don't be bound together with them. Don't be unequally yoked with them. They're of a different kind; an unbeliever doesn't come from the same well that a believer comes from. Don't be isolated from them, but be insulated around them by the truth that lives in you, that's in you. His reasoning is clear. He gives five examples that you can't miss that I've just read as to how absurd a partnership, a covenant, a yoke with an unbeliever is. He shows us that we will never experience the fullness of all that we have in Christ and he tries to tell them this, until they separated themselves from those relationships they had formed with the people who gave the wrong information.

Well, in the last part of verse 16, and "just as God said," and I love that. It wasn't what Paul said or what Moses said or anybody else, "just as God said," and he quotes out of the Old Testament and it's sort of like a hodgepodge. He doesn't take one particular passage, but he says, "'I will dwell in them and walk among them; I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from the midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you.'" And then He says, "And I'll be a Father to you and you shall be sons and daughters to Me." What it means is not that you'll get saved; they're already saved. But what He's talking about is you can walk in the fullness of the adult privileges in the family. And the word for "sons" is that word of adult privileges, the full mature son. Because of being in Christ you can enjoy the full privileges, the fullness of what God offers to you, "says the Lord God Almighty." The promise is in verse 16, the command is in verse 17, the fulfillment and the rejoicing in it is in verse 18.

Well, today, Paul continues to deal with these relationships with the Corinthians. He wants it to be right. And he teaches us what's required if we're going to have right relationships in the body of Christ. I've said many times if it wasn't for people I could live the Christian life. You ever have days like that? What I'm learning is if it wasn't for people—I had it wrong—I would never even understand the Christian life; because that's where Christ enables me to love when I know I cannot do it myself. Let's just see what God has for us. I believe any time we study a book it's God's message to us in the day and hour that we live.

Right relationships begin with ridding oneself of pagan influence

First of all, right relationships in the body of Christ begin with ridding oneself of pagan influence. You've got to get it out. That's why he says separate yourself from it. You see, our main relationship is not with people, it's with God and we've got to honor this. It says in verse 1, "Therefore." Any time you see a "therefore" always look to see what it's there for. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit." Let's just stop right there. When Paul says "Therefore, having these promises," he's referring to what we just read in the last part, 16-18 of chapter 6 and that God said. And we read what God said. This is His promise to us in chapter 6.

Now the Corinthians had a choice to make. Either walk in the fullness of what God offered—and the only way to do that was to separate themselves from the relationships and partnerships with the wrong doctrine that they had embraced—or continue to embrace the wrong doctrine which produces the wrong thinking which produces the wrong living and ruins relationships that you have chosen. But they couldn't have both. The two can't go together. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved," he says, "let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit."

Now the verb "having" in the little phrase "having these promises," is neat. It's in the present tense: always having these promises. "Therefore, always having these promises." In other words, what God says continues to be even today. He's faithful to what He says. Paul says since God has promised all these things and since they're constantly and consistently available in Christ then "let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit." Now this is not the cleansing that God does. This isn't the cleansing of the blood. Yes, there is a cleansing He does within, but this is what we're to do. This is not what God does here. This is what we do enabled by Him, but we have to make a choice.

The word for "cleanse" is the word *katharizo*. It means literally to cleanse something from filth, to purify it. But here it has the idea to rid oneself of what is causing so much harm in his life. Get it out of your life. Get it away from you. Now the verb cleanse is in the aorist tense subjunctive mood. You say, why do you bring this stuff up? Because it's important. The aorist tense means do it. It has a punctiliar sense to it when it's in a command form. Do it tomorrow; do it the next day; do it the next day; next day do it; next day do it. Do it like the Nike commercial, just do it. That's the aorist tense. In other words, get with it. Don't let any grass grow. Get with it. You want a right relationship start here. Get rid of the things that are poisoning your mind. Get rid of the things poisoning your lifestyle. This is, it has the sense, since it's an aorist tense, it has the sense of a command. He's not giving a suggestion here. He's saying you want a right relationship, there's nothing on our end that's restraining it, but you're restraining it by your own affections. Now do something about it.

The subjunctive mood involves a choice that may or may not happen. In other words, that's a real interesting mood there. Paul knows that some of the Corinthian believers are going to hear him, and it's true even in the 21st century that some people are hearing. Some people's hearts are receptive to truth and they're going to move immediately when the Spirit of God speaks to them and they're going to do what Paul asks them to do because he's an apostle and this is God speaking through him. But others are going to be so stubborn and hard headed, they're not about to do it. Paul knows that. That's why he uses the subjunctive mood there. He knows that some will, some won't.

If you want to know, by the way, if you're looking for the perfect church, I told a guy one time he says "I'm going to start me a church". I love these young whippersnappers that think they've got it all together. This cracks me up. "I'm going to start me a church and we're going to do it right". Well, bless your sweet heart, if you start one it's going to be perfect. Don't join it. You're going to mess it up to start with. They forget that they bring people in, then people come in and they bring the baggage with them and before you know it you've got the denomination of the non-denominationals, you've got the same ole, same ole that you're dealing with.

Anybody looking for a perfect church and can't find one that measures to the expectations that he has, he finds his answer right here in the subjunctive mood and the aorist tense that Paul just used with the Corinthians. You see, some people in every church have chosen to walk with God. They've chosen to walk with Him on a plain that many of the people who come, sit and look and they don't have a clue what you're talking about. There are others, though, that are so stubborn they won't give up the wrong thinking the world has given to them. Their flesh responds to it and they won't walk away from it, so you have every kind of person sitting in a congregation even like they had in Corinth in Paul's day. They'd rather listen to the poison than they would walk in the truth.

Well, verse 1 again, "having therefore these promises," you always have them. They're available, dearly beloved. "Let us cleanse ourselves," not a suggestion, but a command, "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit." Now the word "filthiness" is an interesting

word. It's the word *molusmos*. It refers to the act of one's flesh that has caused something to be stained or defiled. It's a rare word. It's not used that many times. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians when he talks about how they'd stained themselves by eating meat sacrificed to idols. He says in 1 Corinthians 8:7, "However, not all men have this knowledge, but some being accustomed to the idol until now eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol and their conscience therefore being weak is defiled." So the act of sin that causes the stain is what this word refers to. So in our context it would be the stained, the defilement of having participated, having embraced not only the false teaching, but the pagan, the pagan ways of Corinth. That's what they've done.

This is why in 1 Corinthians 6 he has to say run from the immorality that you've fallen into. In chapter 7 he says straighten your families out. In chapters 8-10 he says come on, man, grace is not a license. In chapter 11 he says you desecrate the Lord's Supper because of your behavior. In chapter 12 he says you think anything's that's emotional is spiritual. In chapter 13 he says you don't have a clue what love is. In chapter 14 you think that speaking in another tongue is a great thing. He said it's not for believers and it's confusion. And then in chapter 15 he says, hey, you don't even believe in the resurrection of the body of Christ. You don't even believe the gospel if that's the case. And in chapter 16 he says you don't have clue what stewardship is and where it fits into your walk.

You see, they had chosen to believe wrong things and embrace wrong doctrine which had caused the church to be an absolute mess. And Paul says if you want to have right relationships start there and get rid of it. Get it out of your life. I hope you're beginning to see what I've been saying in this little series about having a partnership with unbelievers and how the damage it can cause. I hope you're realizing what wrong doctrine, wrong thinking does to the body of Christ. It affects how one lives. It affects how one has his values. It changes his values. It affects their choices, which is why it affects their relationships. When you don't have unity in the body—that's a birthright; unity is never to be produced by the body, it's to be preserved, Paul says in Ephesians 4:1. We can't produce it. But the way we preserve it is to walk in that covenant relationship with God to where we have separated ourselves from the things that have caused us to think wrongly and the things that have caused us to live wrongly.

But that was not the only unrighteous thing that the immorality that was there. The immorality of Corinth was prostitution. They had a temple there and the women would come down and they actually had illicit sex and thought it was religious and spiritual and that was part of it. But that wasn't the only thing that polluted and stained the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 he says "Or do you not know that the unrighteous," and you find out what the unrighteous, what they're preaching and how they're listening to them, "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God." He says, "Be not deceived, neither fornicators," that's a sexual sin, "nor idolaters" that's an idolatrous sin, "nor adulterers," another sexual sin, "nor effeminate," another sexual sin, "nor homosexual" another sexual sin; you see what was going on, "nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers," he says they won't inherit the kingdom of God. And he says, "And such were some of you." See, many, they've come out of this thing and now they're buying it again. "But you were washed, you were sanctified and you are, were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

So all that defiled, all that stained the believers of Corinth emanated out of wrong doctrine. It all started right there when they stopped believing the truth and they embraced something that was wrong information. It all started right there. And Paul is real inclusive. He makes two inclusive statements. He says "Let us cleanse ourselves." You know, Paul didn't get to the point he thought he'd arrived. Every day of his life he had to deal with his flesh. And then he says, "From all," that's an inclusive word, "filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit."

Now the spiritual sins would probably be back in that idolatrous realm. They had a temple 30 miles down the road, the temple of Delphi, and this is where that woman would come and proclaim herself to be an oracle, a prophetess of that day. And she would sit up in a tripod over a pit that was full of herbs and it would form a drug and it would come up and she'd get so high she didn't even know where she was. And she'd begin to babble language that wasn't language and they had some people there that was just as crazy as she was and they'd write down what she said. She didn't say anything because it wasn't any a language that could be written down.

At the time that Paul wrote that they had miles and miles and miles, people would stand in line. They had to have three of these oracles working all the time because people wanted to hear from the gods. That's why he says in 1 Corinthians 12, he says, "Remember how when you were pagans how you were led astray to the dumb idols." And so that's a lot of garbage going on in Corinth. And some of these people found more excitement in that kind of stuff than they found in the truth, because the truth required them to make some choices and they weren't willing to make those choices. And since they weren't willing to make those choices then they were separated in their relationship with Paul, and that's the deal. Paul says right relationships, if you're going to have them, involves and requires us to live to rid ourselves of the pagan influence.

Right relationships require us to live in respect of who God is

But the second thing he says is right relationships require us, and once you've done that, to live in respect of who God is, to revere Him, to be in awe of Him. He says, the last phrase of verse 1, let me read the whole thing: "Having therefore these promises, dearly

beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Now, that’s a powerful phrase there, “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Perfecting holiness does not mean that any of us are ever going to arrive at perfection. That’s not what he’s saying. The word “perfecting” is the word *epiteleo*. *Epi* intensifies the word. It pushes it to the furthest degree. But the real word is *teleo*. *Teleo* means to accomplish something, to fully accomplish something, to accomplish it to the point nobody doubts it’s being accomplished.

But he’s talking about a process here. It’s in the present tense: Be about perfecting yourself. You’re not going to arrive. Paul says that of himself in Philippians. But be in the process of perfecting yourself. It can be translated “maturing.” Spiritual maturity is what he’s talking about here of what he’s dealing with. You see, while one is ridding himself of that which influences him wrongly and destroys his relationships, at the same time he is perfecting holiness in his life. Holiness means to be set apart unto God. He’s setting himself apart unto God by the way he lives, maturing spiritually.

Proverbs 28:13 says, “He that confesses and forsakes his sin shall receive mercy.” He didn’t just say he who confesses it. What Paul’s dealing with here, get it out of your life. It’s hard, as much as it hurts your flesh, get it out of your life. Get the wrong information out of your mind. Get back into the Word of God. Get back where He needs to be so that you can walk in truth and your relationships will take their own course. This is the way one matures in his faith. It’s not the whole way, but it’s part of the way. He gets that which causes him harm out of his life.

As Paul said in Romans 13:14, he “makes no provision for his flesh”, but “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” And I love this, because in Corinthians he doesn’t tell you what to do on the other side of it, but he does in Romans. “And make no provision for the flesh in regards to its lusts.” If we want to walk together in right relationships we should all be ridding ourselves by putting on Christ in our life. That’s the way you rid yourself. You can’t put on Christ; you can’t yield to Him; at the same time entertain the fleshly desires that we’re talking about. There’s no room for Christ in the wrong thinking of the world at the same time.

The motivation for living this way. Now, what would make a person want to live this way? What would God have to do in a human heart to make somebody want to live this way? He says, “In the fear of God.” Now there’s your motivation right there. The word “fear” doesn’t mean terror. We’ve already seen it earlier in our study. It refers to the reverence and respect for who God is. You see, fear or divine respect for God is part of an ethical sphere that a believer who’s maturing operates in day by day, choice by choice. And understand what I’m saying here. There are two sides inside this ethical sphere. By ethical sphere I mean choices that he makes every day. There’s the side of love which motivates us to do what pleases God to honor His word. But the opposite side of this, the opposite side of the coin, is a divine respect for God which motivates us not to do what displeases God.

So this respect and this reverence for God is what caused Paul to live the way Paul lived. “Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord,” he says back in 5:11, “we persuade men.” Paul says I understand a respect for God. Of course he had a beautiful privilege in that. God stopped him on the Damascus road, revealed Himself to him, blinded him for three days, and he sort of had a respect for who He was. That’d do it. So not only does our respect for God, for who God is, motivate us to do positive things, such as what Paul said back in chapter 5, persuade men to live a certain way, but also it motivates us not to do the negative things that displease God such as making partnerships with poisonous people.

Well, let’s take some inventory before I go on tonight. Is it okay if I do that? Who is influencing you in a negative way right now in your life, feeding you information that you don’t even need to hear, much less that’s not even true? Who’s doing that? Years ago when my wife and I were in another church I noticed when I came home she just wasn’t the same. Something was bugging her, and she’s always been just such a light to me. Finally one day I said, “What is wrong?” She said, “Well, I’ve got to tell you. This particular lady calls me every morning after you leave for the church and she’s always filling my head full of negative stuff. And every time she calls she’s telling me all the garbage I don’t even want to fool with and I can’t deal with.” And we prayed about it. I said, “The best way in the world to handle that is don’t answer the phone.” And she quit answering the phone and quit talking to this woman, and in three days I had a brand new wife.

I’m telling you, folks, who is it that’s influencing you in the way you think right now? Now think about it. Ask God to reveal that to your heart. Who is it that feeds the poison in your life? Who is it that’s so full of contempt and suspicion of everybody that’s causing you to be exactly the same way? What wrong thinking have you bought into today that is causing a rift in your relationships in the body of Christ? What’s going on?

In 7:1 it really completes what happens in chapter 6. You know they didn’t have chapters and verses. They didn’t even have sentence structures there when the Bible was put together, and somebody went in and put chapters and verses. This is one of those chapters that, really verse 1 should have fit back in chapter 6, because it fits everything he said. He addresses the problem and then shows them how to deal with it.

Well, if you’re going to have a right relationship, he says, he helps us; he tells the Corinthians who don’t have those relationships that are right, he says you’re going to have rid yourself of pagan influences causing you to think wrong. It’s causing you to act

wrong. But then secondly, you're going to have to learn to live in respect of who God is. There's that ethical sphere that we talked about where you make your choices, and if what drives you is a fear of the Lord, a respect, a reverence for who He is.

Right relationships require that we choose to trust Christ and other believers

Well finally, thirdly, right relationships require that we choose to trust Christ and other believers. Now this blows me away. There were no real indicators there that Paul had toward the Corinthians, that they would do what was right, that they would even listen to him. But for whatever reason, God working in him, he chose to give the benefit of the doubt to the Corinthians and believe in the Christ that lived within them. You see, right relationships require that we choose at times in our life to trust Christ. I've told my wife many times, don't trust me as far as you can throw me, but trust Christ in me. Trust the Christ in me, because that's the way a believer is. If a believer's in covenant with God you can come to that point even when there's no indication they're even going to do any better, you can come to that point of giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Let me read the next text then I'll come back. Verse 2, "Make room for us in your hearts," Paul says, "we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. I do not speak to condemn you," that's not my heart, "for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together," oh, I love this, "and to live together. Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I'm filled with comfort; I'm overflowing with joy in all our affliction. For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within." Then he's going to go on to say, "but when Titus came he comforted us". We'll get to that.

Paul repeats what he said back in 6:13 in verse 2, when he says "Make room for us in your hearts." You know, somebody's got to drop anchor in relationships and somebody's got to get totally gut honest and be willing to lay it all down. And that's what Paul has done. And he says, now make room for us. I've made room for you. We can walk in oneness together. Any time you have relationships that aren't right in the body of Christ somebody is not willing to obey God. Somebody's not willing to lay it down and make room for others.

Well, this statement also connects however, not only with what he says in 6:13, but it connects with what he says in 6:14. I want you to see that. In 6:14 he says, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers," and he goes on to show why. And what he's saying here is that the only way you can make room for us is to separate yourself from those other relationships. There is no room for us if you're going to embrace unbelievers and make a partnership with them which has affected your wrong thinking and which has affected your wrong way of living.

Make room for us, Paul says, by separating yourselves from the pagan influence in your lives. Just like loving and fearing God go together, so do these two things go together. If you're going to make room you've got to get rid of the other. As a believer you cannot walk in unity with those who love God and live to honor Him at the same time embracing wrong doctrine and wrong thinking. You cannot have, and I want to make this statement real clear. I don't say many profound things and when I do I just want to draw your attention to it. Impure doctrine—now listen to me carefully—always breeds impure devotion, always. Impure doctrine breeds impure devotion. Pure doctrine and pure devotion both go together. Devotion to God and devotion to man and the doctrine has to marry together. You can't find somebody with pure devotion who has a wrong doctrine. No sir. It's impure. He says in verse 2 again, "Make room for us in your hearts." And Paul believes that they're going to do that and he also believes that they're going to listen to him. He says, "we wronged no one." They knew that. He says "we corrupted nobody, no one." They knew that. "We took advantage of no one."

And then Paul asserts that they are eternally bound together in Christ. You talk about relationship, whether they're going to live that way or not, they are bound together in Christ. He says, "I don't speak to condemn you, for I said before that you're in our hearts to die together and to live together." Now that's covenant language right there. You talk about being in a partnership with somebody, when you receive Christ, and another person receives Christ you're bound together. Now, if you're not living this way it doesn't alter that fact. Now, you're not enjoying it, the unity you could have in the Spirit, but if there's disunity somebody doesn't have a clue what being a Christian is. We're in a covenant. We're in a family and we're bound together. To die together and to live together. They had all died the same death to sin and they were seeking to live the same spiritual life unto God.

And I love the order he puts this. It's profound: Death always comes before life. He uses the aorist tense. So yes, we did die. You have to die in order to become a believer. But daily we need to die, die to Wayne by saying yes to God. And this is really what he's dealing with the Corinthians. He's saying, "Corinthians, it's not that big of a deal. If you'll just go on and say yes to God, then you will break those relationships because you can't marry the two together. And when you do that we're already in oneness to die together and to live together." Talk about a partnership in Christ. What a difference between forming an alliance with an unbeliever and being in alliance in covenant with a believer. That's what he's trying to get across to them.

There's no sense in this kind of thing. I've always thought this, every place I've ever lived, and this is coming out of my heart, but every place I've ever lived it's musical churches. I'll tell you what. "Brother Wayne, I don't like the music. I'm going down here." And

they go to here and then get down there and they don't like the preacher. So they tell him "I don't like your preaching. You're not feeding me. So I'm going to go down here." And I'm thinking, what God's thinking all along this time? What in the world are people doing? They're trying to form a covenant or a partnership with people they don't even relate to. The people that they're in covenant with, they won't walk with because they won't separate themselves from that which has caused the wrong thinking which has caused the broken relationships with others.

Well, we find out here about his third letter that he wrote that Titus took. And when he went down to Troas and couldn't find Titus, buddy, that really bothered him and he goes to Macedonia and finds Titus. Paul was so anxious. He wrote them a letter that scalded them to deal with some things. Some people think it's the incest the situation in chapter 5. I don't. I think it was the false teachers. Somebody in there had propagated a lot of lies against Paul, probably both, I don't know. But he wanted to see how they dealt with it. And we've studied this. Remember he said, "I wrote you a letter because I didn't want to hurt you." Paul says, "Buddy, if I come to you you're going to regret the day I walked in your midst so I decided not to come to you. I decided to write you a letter." Boy, he must have been one tough nut, you know it.

And he said, "Man, I so believed in you. I chose to give you the benefit of the doubt. I chose to believe that you're going to respond to what I've asked you to do. I chose to believe that and I was so anxious." He says in verse 4, "Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf." He even told Titus, he told everybody, "I believe they're going to respond. I just believe the Christ in them are going to, it's going to help them to see what I'm saying."

"I'm filled with comfort; I'm overflowing with joy in all of our affliction." And he says in verse 5, "For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. But God," verse 6, "who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus." And old Titus saw him in Macedonia and, hey, can't you just seem him? Hey, Paul! Come here man, come here. And Paul said, "What did they do? What did they do?" And he says, "Man, you're going to shout till Jesus comes back. They responded, Paul. They did exactly like you thought they were going to do. They are believers over there. They're in covenant with us. The relationship was broken, but they're dealing with it and you can walk with them again." That thrilled his heart. It thrilled his heart.

There's going to come a point in your life when you're going to be in a rift between you and another believer. But if that person's a believer and you have confidence that he's a believer, and you've done everything you know to do on your part, you may have to lay it down and give them a benefit of the doubt and trust the Christ that lives in them and let God bring that relationship back to where it needs to be. You can't do another thing, but God can do that. God can establish that in your heart.

You know what I want to share with you? Giving a brother the benefit of the doubt to me is the first real fruit of a person who's spiritually mature walking with God. That's the first thing. You don't ever accept what somebody says. You don't ever accept what you see on the surface alone, because if he's a believer you die together and you live together and God's going to somehow bring that covenant full circle. And you believe it, you believe it. You just choose to believe it. Don't you wish everybody in your life would give you the benefit of the doubt when you're not living the way you ought to live and say, you know what, I'm going to trust Christ in you. I've told you what to do. You know exactly what the problem is. I'm just going to commit you over to Him and I'm going to wait with rejoicing. I'll be a little anxious, but I want to hear how God's brought you full circle.

I have several friends that are college presidents. They're Christian presidents of colleges. One of them several months ago said to me, "Wayne, would you pray for me?" And I said sure. What's up? He said, "I have a board at the school who have always done it a certain way and they won't get off of that." And he says "everything I try to do that's innovative or creative," he said, "Man, you know my stand on the word of God." And, buddy, he doesn't budge. But he said, "They can't stand change and they always somehow connect me to other presidents of colleges that have gone the way of the world, Christian colleges, and have walked away from their devotion to truth and to God's Word." And he said, "I'm not that way, but they won't give me the benefit of the doubt." And I thought welcome to Christianity in the 21st century.

The wrong information that people embrace, and will not turn loose of causes them not to be able to give another the benefit of the doubt and they can't walk together any more. So what's the first thing we do? Get rid of that which is causing the poison in our life. What's the second thing that we do? We live in respect for who God is and what His Word says. And the third thing choose, once you've gone as far as you can go, choose to trust the Christ in the one that you're really bound to, but he doesn't get it, because you died together and you're going to live together and he just doesn't get it yet, because that's the birthright of all believers is to be in oneness together. That's the key.

Well, I hope this says to you what it sure has said to me.

The Repentance in Right Relationships

Well, turn with me to 2 Corinthians 7:6-11. Taking a few more verses than I normally take. We're talking about the importance of right relationships, and today it's going to be about the repentance in right relationships. Now we've seen so far the recipe of right relationships. You know a recipe is when you have ingredients, when put together the right way, turns out the right way. We talked about the requirements of right relationships, but today is going to be a tough message: the repentance that is necessary for right relationships.

Before a relationship can be made right, the one who has sinned, maybe it's both parties, but the one who has sinned, whatever the cause is, they're going to have to learn to repent. There cannot be the kind of relationships that God promises us that is ours in Him until that repentance takes place. Paul's relationships with the believers in Corinth had been a very shaky one at best. But it was not of his doing; this was not a matter where he had to repent and they had to repent. This was not of his doing that caused the relationship to be difficult. What caused it to be difficult was that the Corinthian believers had bought into wrong thinking, wrong doctrine. Whether it came from a false teacher or whether it came from the worldly humanistic doctrine of that time, but it translated into a wrong living and that severed the relationship with Paul.

They couldn't walk in agreement. Here's Paul walking by faith; anything not of faith is sin and without faith it's impossible to please God. And so he had chosen to live this way and they had chosen to live after their flesh and as a result the two could not walk together. When this happens in the body of Christ, and it will happen and is happening in the body of Christ, somebody has to drop anchor first in order for that relationship to come back. And it's usually the one who is most spiritual. It's a most interesting thing: the one who is most spiritual has to drop the anchor. He's the one who has to initiate the process because the one walking after the flesh really doesn't care, he's already been deceived. And so the one who's walking with God drops the anchor.

I don't mean drop the anchor on somebody's head. Paul knew that in order for a relationship with the Corinthians and himself to be made right, they had to be open and honest with one another. He makes the first move. The first move is not in chapter 6. The first move is the letter he wrote to them. You see, 2 Corinthians is a response to that third letter and how they responded. He makes that first move.

Now we do see in 6:3-10 how he opens himself up and he says, "Hey, guys, there's nothing on my end of this thing. I'm walking with God, I love you, I'm as honest as I know how to be." He opens himself up, but he knows that their relationship with him will never be made right until the Corinthians were willing to rid themselves of the poisonous information they were getting from the wrong people which was severing their relationship with Paul.

He says in 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises," and he refers to how God would welcome them into His fullness if they would just do what He told them to do, "having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." You see, when we cleanse ourselves of anything that is defiling of our flesh or our spirit, those ungodly influences in our life, then what happens is that we are maturing, we're growing, and we're making room for the Lord Jesus to do what He wants to do through our lives. That's when right relationships can happen; only then. Unless a person is walking with God, emptying himself of those ungodly influences in his life, he cannot have a right relationship with a brother who is.

Well, this is very important, I must say right here, when we talk about cleansing ourselves of things that are ungodly and ungodly influences in our life. I've come to understand that some of you have gotten a little confused about this. I want to make sure that we clear it up.

You're married to an unbeliever. You have realized that Paul has said, "Do not be unequally yoked; do not form a partnership with others that are ungodly. And you realize you've made a mistake, but now you don't know what to do about it. You hear Paul say, "cleanse yourself of these influences." You hear him say "don't make a partnership," and you've gotten confused. Well, I tried to say this: there are some relationships you can break, but marriage is not one of them.

Now, let's make sure we understand that. You can't unscramble eggs. Paul is not saying break the relationship in marriage. "Well, what can I take out of this? How does it help me?" Listen, you can cleanse yourself of anything that would corrupt your thinking towards the one to whom you're married and allow Christ to love that one through you. But I want to make sure we clear that up because you have to understand that his context is not talking about marriage. If he would have been talking about marriage he would have been much more specific. He left it open-ended; we threw marriage out as an example. Perhaps that was the wrong thing to do. Perhaps somebody grabbed hold of that.

But he's not talking about that. He's talking about the Corinthians and how they had embraced the teaching and the thinking of the world and as a result of that it has so changed the way they live, which is to please their flesh, that they can't walk in oneness with Paul. That's what he's talking about. He's told us that to have right relationships we're going to have to take it to the step of having a respect of who God is, to live in fear of Him. And that's a good word; it means "awe and reverence of who He is." And when it comes

to hurtful things that believers do to us and when we've gone the length of knowing whatever we can do to be open and honest and we tried to get their attention as to what was going on, we come to a point where we have to trust Christ in their heart. If they're believers we can't go any further.

We choose not to be disassociated from a believer in the sense that we still love him and care about him. We don't make intimate partnerships with them because they're leaning the wrong way, but what we're trying to do here is to come back in oneness together. We have to learn to give them the benefit of the doubt and we have to learn to trust Christ in their lives, that He'll bring them around.

Well, we're going to see that happening today. We're going to see the fact that Paul has trusted Christ in the Corinthian people. He has given them the benefit of the doubt. He believes that if they truly are believers, they're going to come around that corner and they're going to come back into a relationship with him. We're going to see how that repentance, which is so essential, is a change of heart; it's a change of mind. But it has to be a change of actions or it's not repentance. We're going to see that. And this happened to the church of Corinth. It's a most beautiful story and yet there's a lot of pain in what we're going to share today. God broke through; God broke through.

And I tell you, what is God saying to us as a church in these days? It pays to trust Christ in an individual rather than base yourself on wrong information and fight them, it's much better to lay it down and say, "Oh God, I can't, but You can. You never said I could, but You always said You would. God, would You love this person through me? And God will You bring and restore that individual back where he needs to be where he's walking by faith?"

It is necessary to see a picture of true repentance to have a right relationship with each other

Well, Paul did that for us and as an example to us and we're going to see what happened today. Three things about repentance that are absolutely necessary if we're going to have right relationships with each other. First of all we see a picture of true repentance. You say, "What does it look like? What does it look like when somebody who is way over here all of a sudden turns around and comes full circle?" Well, God's going to give that to us.

You remember that Paul had sent Titus with that third letter. We don't have it; it's mentioned and referred to many times in 2 Corinthians. And he sent the letter with him and he wanted to hear back from Titus how they responded to this letter. And so he goes to Troas to meet Titus, but when he gets there Titus is not there. But the information that he does bring to him in Macedonia when he finally sees him, is overwhelming.

Paul had given the believers in Corinth the benefit of the doubt and Christ rewarded him for doing that. Christ rewarded him by showing him how that only Christ can change the hearts of people that are disenfranchised in their relationships. Verse 6, "But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more."

Now way back in 2:13 we find a little of this story; we've already covered it. When Paul got to Troas and Titus was not there, it troubled him. God opened the great door of ministry to him in Troas, but Paul walked away from it. He knew that if God opened the door, it would still be opened when he came back. What God opens, no man can close. So in verse 13 he says, "I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia." And when Paul got to Macedonia he was struggling on the inside.

You know, we keep thinking of Paul and others, that they have arrived. No, they're human beings like you and me, and he was struggling internally. He was so concerned about the Corinthian believers, he so loved them he wanted to see them come back to walking by faith, to come back to trusting and believing God so that they could walk together. The much more important thing was so that they would trust God. His condition that he was in before he saw Titus is mentioned in verse 6. It says that God comforts the depressed, "But God, who comforts the depressed." I love this; this is so honest.

The word "depressed" is the word tapeinos. Normally that's translated "humble," but the word in its literal form doesn't mean humble, it means flat. You see, when a person is humble he's so far down nobody can see him because there is nothing worthy about him to be seen. But the word here is used in much more of a technical sense. A flat idea here. You see, Paul was emotionally and mentally flat. That's what he calls depressed here; it's translated depressed. Concerning the Corinthians Paul was mentally and emotionally flat. It would be more in the idea of discouraged or more in the idea of overwhelmed, but not the kind of depression that we think of. It's translated that way, but it just seems to mean he's emotionally and he's mentally flat.

Let me ask you a question? Have you ever been there before? Well, we've all been there, haven't we? And you know what? It came from a deep burden for other people. That's the beauty of this thing; it didn't come from a person walking after his flesh. It came from a person so in love with God that he loved God's people, but he wanted to see God's people do the right thing. And he didn't know, he just didn't know, and that anxiety or something built up inside of him to where it would even be translated "flat." He was

emotionally flat, and spiritually. And what Paul wants us to know is that God comforts those who get into this position.

God comforts the depressed, the word is parakaleo, God comes alongside a person when he's overwhelmed and distraught. At the condition of the church of Jesus Christ when he's overwhelmed and distraught at the people around him that aren't walking and he wants so badly to see them walk by faith. God comforts those people. Now He does it in many different ways but God, "who comforts the depressed," he says, "comforted us by the coming of Titus."

Wouldn't you like to have been a fly on the wall when Titus showed up in Macedonia? And they embraced when Paul saw Titus. Titus told him the response of the Corinthians. He told him what he had seen them do when they read the letter from Paul that was a hard, difficult letter. It says in verse 7, "and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more." I love this.

God always shows up at the right time and He won't do it the same way every time; but when a person is overwhelmed and flat emotionally and mentally, seeking the Lord and he can't understand why other people can't see it, and he can't understand why other people can't go on and walk by faith, when he's deeply overwhelmed, God will comfort and God will be right on time when He does this. Titus was a precious sight in Paul's eyes.

I've debated about sharing this. I'm going to go ahead and do it anyway. I just want you to know who I am. This budget deficit that we've been going through and experiencing has been troubling to me. Not because of the money, that has never bothered me. I'm not about money, never have been about it. I believe God can sell a cow when it's on the side of a hill and take care of it so fast as to make your head swim. That's not my problem. I've been in the ministry 43 years. This is nothing new in a church, folks. It's a beautiful opportunity to learn to trust God.

But what burdens me and what's overwhelming me and actually this past week, even when we prayed, inside of me I was flat. Understand what he's saying here, because in my heart what's troubling me is the way people view this type of thing. The way they look at it with such narrow minded tunnel vision and they can't see the big picture. How they react rather than respond and I think that this is a test. I think this budget deficit we're going through right now is a test to see where this church is going to go in days ahead. Are we going to trust God or are we going to become suspicious and critical of one another because we're just simply in a budget deficit?

I've been in the ministry now for so long. I want to finish well, I want to be in a church sometime before I die that's willing to trust God when these things come and not throw stones at everybody else and try to figure it out the way the world would figure it out. And this past week I was flat.

I went hunting this past week. Relax, the deer are fine. They give you their greetings. They thank you for sending us in the woods where they could be safe. We had the best time. Oh my goodness, a great time. But what comforted me was not that.

Wednesday morning we were about ready to leave and I was sitting by the campfire. We were thirty miles from anybody. And we'd eaten breakfast and we were getting ready to tear the camp down and come on back for Wednesday night and I was sitting there talking to one of the men, and he was looking at me and all of a sudden something changed on his face. He said, "Look at that, look at that." I turned to look and a dove, now you don't call them doves, you call them mountain pigeons, but they look exactly like a dove. It looked like somebody has taken a pump and pumped them up because they're about four times the size of any dove you've ever seen. And you only find them at high altitudes and you only find them in the mountains like that.

And that dove flew down and it landed about a foot from me and just looked at me. It flew off up into a tree, and we were sitting there talking about how unusual that was. What is the dove the symbol of in Scripture? God's peace. We were sitting there talking about that and all of a sudden that dove came down again. This time he landed on my chair, about an inch from the end of my finger. He just stood there and looked at me. Then he jumped over on my leg to where he could look at me straight. He jumped over and just looked at me for the longest time.

Now you think I'm mystical? I was almost hesitant to share this with you because to some people it's going to sound silly. But let me tell you what God said to me. You know what I believe God said to me, and I'm going to say this to you as our church today. I believe God said, "Wayne, calm down, son, calm down. I'm in charge; it's going to be alright. You just trust Me. I'm going to take you through this difficult time. I'm going to show you that we don't trust in the wisdom of men; we trust in the wisdom of God and we're going to walk together by faith." That's what He said to me.

I don't see this deficit to be a problem. I see it to be an opportunity. And I think what God's wanting to do is to involve as many people as He possibly can in the blessing that He wants to give us. They don't even understand giving, they don't understand money. But hang on, we'll get to chapter 8 pretty soon and they'll be an understanding. But I just wanted to share that with you. God comforts the depressed. God comforts those who are mentally flat and emotionally flat. And He may do it with a Titus coming down the road; He may do it with a mountain pigeon in the middle of the woods somewhere. He will do, He will come at the right time and

let you know that trusting Him is the only way to go.

Paul knew the God of all comfort. We spent the whole chapter 1 talking about that. He has told us in chapter 1 all about it. Paul's comfort wasn't just in seeing Titus, oh no, that was part of it. He was so worried about him. But not only that, it was in hearing what Titus had to say. Titus had been so comforted when he saw the response of the Corinthian believers that it was overwhelming to him and that spilled all over Paul when he saw him. "But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you."

It was something that happened to the Corinthians that was so miraculous, so of God, that it had a deep affect upon Titus and now it has a deep affect upon Paul. And Paul tells us what it was. He says, "as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more." God had turned their hearts back to Paul. You know, that would thrill anybody who had a broken relationship with another believer because they had bought into the world's way of thinking and they couldn't walk in agreement. And then they were questioning you and suspicious of you and all of a sudden God changes their hearts and brings them back and turns them toward you. That's a God thing.

Look at the words he used here: "as he reported to us your longing." The word "longing" is the word *epipothesis* from *epipotheo*. It means to desire something, to long for someone, to regard with longing to see someone. And the little *epi* that is in front of it and I've used this many times with you to show you that little *epi* intensifies it, it's an intensifier. They were loooonging to see Paul. Of course, the little word *epi* intensifies. Wow, what a change.

The word "mourning" is a beautiful word that expresses one's heartfelt love and concern for somebody. It's the word *odurmos*. It means to wail, to lament over somebody. It's only used two times in the New Testament and it's so beautiful that the Holy Spirit chose to use it here and in another to give us an example of what He's talking about. It was used in Matthew as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah. It was just after Herod slew all the children under two years old. They were seeking to find the baby Jesus and kill Him and in Matthew 2:18 it says, "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning," there's your word right there, "Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more." So it's a voice of lament.

It's a voice of lament over somebody who has been hurt or over somebody that you have hurt. Paul adds "your zeal for me." The word "zeal" is the word *zelos*, and when used in a good sense it means "your zeal to be like somebody, to emulate them." Look what's happened, the Corinthians had come full circle. All of a sudden they didn't only long to see Paul, they mourned because they had hurt him. They were deeply sorrowful and now they wished to emulate Paul in their life.

Now this is a picture of what repentance does in a person's life. This is a picture of that inward heart change, not only a mind change but a heart change, and also a life change that only God can bring in an individual's life. And that's what brought these people back together, that time of brokenness. God had done a real work at the church of Corinth. So we see a picture then of what we're talking about when you say, "Repentance, what do you mean?" I'm talking about a radical, complete, transforming change to where a person now is totally different because God has done something in their life.

It is necessary to see the pain of true repentance to have a right relationship with each other

But the second thing I want you to see is the pain that's involved in repentance. For a person to come to repentance he must be confronted, and it's painful, with the problem, with the sin, with whatever it is that has caused the brokenness in the relationship. Somebody has to pay a great price in order for the truth to come out. He says in verse 8, "For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while—I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance."

Paul had written them a very stern letter knowing that it would bring much pain to them. You see, they stood guilty of some pretty tough things that they had done and they needed to hear it and so the more spiritual one dropped the anchor and went to them. We know that there was someone who was the source of all this bad information and this suspicion and criticism towards the apostle Paul. And isn't it amazing how it only takes one person, one rotten apple in the barrel to try to spoil the whole barrel. That's all it was. Such harsh criticism that they even challenged his being an apostle.

That's what much of this letter is about is defending his apostleship. Paul defends himself of this criticism back in chapter 2, and we're going to see in the last four chapters of the letter that he'll do the same thing. And Paul points to this ring leader back in chapter 2:6. He says, "Sufficient for such a one" it's very individual, "is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority." Remember, this letter is in response. He's telling you the story now in chapter 7. Some also say that Paul had in mind that chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians that man who was sleeping with his father's wife and the church wouldn't discipline him for it. He was committing adultery and incest in the same act and nobody would do anything. And that could be.

There might have been even more, but we know that most of this was dealing with the criticism of his being an apostle and the false teachers that had gotten there, but the church wouldn't do anything about it. The whole church just stood there; it's amazing to me

how many good people don't say anything when the time is right to say it. And so they had the vocal minority that took over. So when Paul wrote them this stern letter that Titus took to them, he knew it was going to hurt them when they heard what he had to say. Remember he said, "If I come to you, it's going to hurt you really bad. I'm going to write you to spare you that pain." He evidently was a fireball.

He regretted hurting them but he didn't regret saying what he had to say. "For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while." See, Paul doesn't rejoice in the fact that they had to go through the pain. Paul doesn't rejoice in that at all. He rejoices in the true repentance that is in their hearts, where the pain took them, and how they responded properly to that pain. Paul is saying, "I'm so sorry that I had to hurt you, I regret that part of it. I regret you being hurt, but I don't regret the fact because I see where it took you. I see healing that came in your life."

Now the word "repentance" in verse 9 is a special word that we need to understand because there are a lot of interesting thoughts about this. The word is metanoia and it comes from the word metanoeo. It's made up of two words, obviously, meta and noeo. Meta denotes a change in condition. When you have a "meta" in front of a word it means a change in condition. And the word noeo refers to the exercise of the mind in comprehending something. It's a change in a condition of how you look at something. Metanoia is a change of one's seeing something differently. He used to see it this way but now he sees it this way, in its real form and it has an effect upon his life.

Now listen, if there's no change in a person's living, then there has been no change in the way he thinks. You have to understand this. Many people can say, "Oh, I'm guilty," but they never really see it the way God wants them to see it. Repentance is not valid unless there's evidence in how one lives. In Matthew 3:8, "Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance." Repentance is going to change you, not only the way you think, not only the way you feel, but the way that you live.

God used this tough letter that Paul had written to the Corinthians; it got their attention. Tough things he had to say, but God caused a complete change in their attitude and their way of thinking towards Paul. You see, repentance is not solely the work of man. We've always made it the work of man. "You better change, boy, you better get your life right, boy." No, it involves the work of God. God is in the midst of what repentance is all about. In Acts 5:31, speaking of Christ, "He is the One whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." And then it says in Acts 11:18, "And when they heard this, they quieted down, and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'"

You see, the Holy Spirit reveals a person of what he's done wrong. Listen, you can see something that you've messed up on, but until you see it as sin and as a transgression against God, then you don't understand repentance. This is why the Holy Spirit came to live: to convict us of sin and of judgment. He opens our hearts to say, "Oh my, look what we have done to Paul, look what we have done to God." This is a transgression against God. Then when a person sees that the Holy Spirit gives them the will and the desire to change and then He enables him to do that. That's what grace is all about.

So repentance is not something that you say, "You better change your life." Nobody has ever changed anything. We think so often that confession and repentance is promising God to do better. I've never done better yet and neither have you. But when we've repented, when God has opened our heart and we have seen the pain that we have caused Him and when we see that our sin has not just been against our brother, that idle word that we said in a backroom, that critical word that we said in a mixed group, and we see that it's not just against that person we said it; we've said it in the presence of God and God convicts us of that and when He convicts us of it, the pain is excruciating and we weep and when Peter denied Jesus and he realized what he had done, he wept bitterly. There's a bitterness here of a heart-felt sorrow that repentance brings.

Don't ever think it's just because somebody says "I'm sorry" everything is going to be alright. That's not repentance. Repentance is a God-work that only God can do in a person's heart. The pain is not only felt by the one who realizes what he's done; the pain is also felt by that spiritual one who's had to go to him and tell him the hard things. It's a pain on both sides.

Verse 9, "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance." The word "sorrow" is the word *lupeo*, and it means to be deeply grieved, overwhelmed by sadness. Paul doesn't rejoice in the fact that they had to go through the pain, but the kind of pain they went through he does rejoice with because it was a God kind of pain and it led them to repentance. The way to repentance is the way of grief and sorrow, but the end is worth it all. There's no way you can have a painless, griefless repentance. A broken and a contrite heart is not a pleasant sensation.

It is necessary to see the pattern of true repentance to have a right relationship with each other

So we see a picture of what the result is and then we see the pain that they had to go through for that to happen. We see how God had to get involved in this and we see how God works in His people, how He works in the hearts of those that He loves. And then thirdly we see the pattern of true repentance. What steps did they go through? And you begin to see what repentance does when God does it. He says in verse 10, "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading

to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you; what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.”

Paul contrasts two kinds of sorrow here in verses 10-11. He contrasts a sorrow of the world and he contrasts the sorrow that is according to the will of God. Now verse 10 again, “For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation;” but then he contrasts, “but the sorrow of the world produces death.” Boy, that’s quite a difference between these two sorrows. The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces repentance, notice carefully, this is important, that leads to salvation. It doesn’t produce salvation. This is where people mess up. Only God can bring about that deliverance, only God can bring about that salvation.

What do you mean by salvation? Do you mean when I first got saved? Listen, salvation is restoration to the fullness of life whether it be our deliverance from a damning sin or whether, as in our context, is to believer’s deliverance from personal sin back into the fullness of life not only with God but with Paul. That’s what salvation is. And only God can bring that about. Whether it be before a person gets saved or after he’s saved being delivered. God has to bring that about. This kind of sorrow, godly sorrow, produces repentance but yet it leads to salvation.

Godly sorrow produces a radical change of both heart and life as one is delivered from wrong living back into the fullness of life. Point is, one more time; only God can bring this about. The sorrow inflicted by God Himself produces repentance which leads to salvation. The Corinthians’ genuine sorrow resulted in an earnestness to make things right with Paul, and eagerness to vindicate themselves of the wrong choices: A willingness to take effective action against Paul’s opponent; an emotional longing and concern for Paul.

But in contrast to that, and he doesn’t spend any time on it, is the sorrow of the world. Now understand this: the sorrow of the world is a definite grief. It is a grief over one’s actions and over the consequences of their actions. But it is an unproductive grief. Let me explain that: because it leads to no change of heart and no change of life. We see this everywhere we look. We see people that are lost and don’t even understand what’s going on. They’re sorry for what they’ve done, they feel the guilt of their circumstances and they’re looking in all the wrong places and they’re getting worse instead of getting better.

But a believer with godly sorrow leads to repentance, a change of mind, heart, and action, caused really by God Himself and then a salvation, a deliverance from that which has held him in bondage and ruined the relationships around him. Instead, you see Paul is focused on Godly sorrow. He doesn’t say anything more about worldly sorrow so I’m not going to say anything more. That’s not his point. His point is to look what changed the hearts and the lives of the Corinthians.

Verse 11, “For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you,” and then he shows you the progression, “what vindication of yourselves.” Isn’t it awesome to be vindicated? All the suspensions, all the wrong things that they were saying to him based on the wrong information they were getting; now they have changed and turned and not it’s vindicated them. The fact that they have changed and been willing to admit where they were wrong vindicates them as believers.

And in verse 11 here comes the pattern of that vindication. First of all they were indignant towards their sin which means they saw their sin as what it was, and they moved quickly to deal with it. Let me ask you a question this morning. When you have sinned, and the Holy Spirit convicts you of that which is a step in repentance, He’s got to convict you, and you realize what’s wrong, what’s that like in your life? I would love for us to have small group discussion sometime on this. You know what it’s like in my life? A horse has kicked me in the chest and I have absolutely no relief until I do what God’s told me to do.

I’m very cautious about people who can live in sin and never be convicted and never change. Something’s wrong in the church of Jesus Christ in the 21st century: we have people sitting on pews that don’t even know the Lord Jesus Christ. There’s got to be that indignant attitude toward sin. God brings that about. You hate it; it’s filthy. I want to get away from it. And they did this with fear. Out of the absolute alarm for the seriousness of what they had done, they had a longing to make things right with Paul. They were filled with zeal, a burning desire to get this behind them, under the blood, out of the way so that they could move on with their life and they sought to avenge the evil that they had done by doing what was right.

The word “avenge” there *ekdikesis*. It’s used in Romans 12, it’s the word that means to execute justice and the only justice towards sin is to confess it, have that repentant attitude towards it where you change, get it under the blood, get it out of the way, and move on in your walk with God. And you know what? All of that proved them to be innocent. What do you mean innocent? They were as guilty as sin. What he means by that is they were not guilty of what they did as much as what they didn’t do. The church here is what’s in question and they listened and by their silence, by their allowing the poison to continue in the body, they advocated it and they were as guilty as the people saying it.

And Paul said, “Now you’re innocent of it.” You’ve been cleansed, vindicated, and they’re back into that beautiful relationship

together. So the picture of true repentance is gorgeous, it's awesome. But the pain is sometimes forgotten of what you go through and the Holy Spirit will see to it that you are grieved because it grieves the very Spirit of God, but not only that, the beautiful pattern of how it goes on. You will hate that sin. You will hate that sin. It's not you hating it; it's God in you hating it. And you begin to get in touch with who He is. And I'll tell you what, when that repentance takes place in God's people, you're going to see them walk together like never before. Right relationships require repentance to take place in God's people.

2 Corinthians 7:12-16

Rejoicing in Repentance

Turn to 2 Corinthians 7 and we're going to actually finish a chapter again. We're going to be looking at verses 12-16 tonight. We want to talk about the rejoicing in repentance. Now, if you've ever had to do the hard thing in telling someone that they are the cause of your relationship being broken, and if you had to go a long time before you have heard whether or not how they have responded, whether or not they have repented, and if you topped it all off with the fact that there was great distance between you, then you can understand why Paul was so emotionally and mentally flat when he arrived in Macedonia.

Now Paul was the one who had to tell them the hard things. He had sent a third letter, a very difficult letter, to the church of Corinth, knowing that it would bring a lot of pain to them when they received it. He had chosen to believe that Christ lived in them, would bring them around and cause them to do the right thing. Now he sent this letter by the man who he called his child in a like and a common faith, over in Titus. His name was Titus.

He sent the letter with him; he was a co-worker to Paul and he could hardly wait to see what he believed would be the response of that church. Paul wanted to hear, so he went down to Troas to meet Titus, and Titus wasn't there. And this concerned Paul because he should have been there, so Paul set sail over to Macedonia. He made his way quickly because he was so overwhelmed with not understanding how they had responded to that letter. The situation of not knowing caused Paul to be mentally and as I said earlier, emotionally, flat by the time that he got to Macedonia.

Verses 5-6 of chapter 7 say, "For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side; conflicts without, fears within. But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus." Now the word depressed as we saw last time means flat. In this case, mentally and emotionally flat. Any of you ever been there in your walk with the Lord at times? I have too. But God comforts the depressed.

And it's amazing; I've learned a little bit about this thing in my walk with Him. He's slow sometimes, in my estimation, but He's just never late. Have you ever noticed that? He never shows up when I think He ought to show up, but He shows up when it's the right time to show up. And He shows up in Titus, and Titus brings good news from the Corinthian believers.

By the way, I told you last week about being out camping and hunting with a bunch of the guys and how God just comforted my heart and sent that mountain pigeon, that dove. He jumped over on my foot as if to say, "Do you get the message?" And I got it. I've been basking in that. That does not happen by the way. You don't see these birds very often. They're only found at high altitudes. They look like a dove that somebody has taken a bicycle pump and pumped it up about 4 times the size and they're not people friendly. They don't do this.

That wasn't Titus, but that was my Titus. How God just comforted my heart by what took place in that. Titus came bouncing into Macedonia thrilled as he could possibly be at the repentance of the Corinthian believers and just couldn't wait to tell the apostle Paul. Verse 7 says, "and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more."

That word "rejoice" is used four times in the verb and two times as a noun from verse 7 on, so it's a real theme of what Paul is talking about right here. The Corinthians had gone from suspecting Paul, they had turned all the way around, and this suspicion was based on wrong information to start with, to longing to see him, to sorrowing over how they had hurt him and wanting to emulate him in their lives. Wow, what a picture of repentance. All the pain that Paul went through to write that third letter and it hurt him to write it, and all the pain they went through when they got the letter and realized what God was trying to say to them was worth it all.

God had broken through to the hearts of the believers there in Corinth and they were filled with His sorrow, God's sorrow, to the point of repentance which leads, as he says, to salvation. Now Paul, in our last message, shows us the difference in godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Worldly sorrow only cries, it sheds bitter tears, there's a lot of pain in it, but it gets worse, not better. There's no change. There will never be any change because true repentance is of God. Godly sorrow works repentance which is a complete change in the mind, that's part of it, but it's also a change of the heart, and it's also a total change, a radical change, in one's actions, in the individual.

Now listen, if there's no change of life then there has been no repentance. Verse 10, "For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret," you never regret this, even though the pain is deep, "leading to salvation." God delivers you from the problem, just like He had delivered the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian believers. "But the sorrow of the world produces death." There's nothing in it.

The pattern of their repentance when God broke their hearts and showed them their sin is found in verse 11, and it's a beautiful picture of what happens when God gets involved. You see, God is the One who grants repentance, as we saw the last time. God's the One who helps you realize that you didn't just sin against your brother; you sinned against a Holy God. And you see it for what it's worth and you feel it in your spirit. He says in verse 11, "For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter."

The word "vindicate" is the word *apologeoa*. Their willingness to repent showed really who they were. They weren't guilty for what they had done; they were guilty for what they hadn't done. There were certain people in that church that was causing the problem, but the repentance of the Corinthian believers truly bright forth to everybody that they were who they said that they were. Their answer was to repent.

First of all, they were indignant toward their sin, which means they were repulsed by it. And they immediately wanted it out of their life. They moved quickly to deal with it. They did this with fear, he said, out of an alarm for the seriousness of what they had done. They had a longing in their heart and God does this, to be with Paul and to make things right. They were filled with zeal which is a burning desire to get this behind them and to move on. They sought to avenge the evil they had done by doing what was right. And the word *avenge* is the word *ekdikesis*, which means to execute justice, to see to it that it's done. And it was dealt with the right way.

And this proved them to be innocent. And again, they had sinned, yes, because they hadn't done what Paul expected them to do. But other people in the church had been the cause of the problem, but the church wouldn't deal with it, whether it be the man in 1 Corinthians 5 that was sleeping with his father's wife, or whether it be the false teachers that had gotten in and the wrong information, whatever it was, they hadn't dealt with it.

You see, we can learn something from this. When wrong is wrong, it's wrong. When God's people don't say a thing, when God's people don't do what is right, they're just as guilty as the one who has done it. And Paul so loved the believers of Corinth that he rejoiced in their repentance. And that's really where we're headed. I want to talk about this joy that comes when God's people repent; when they deal with that which God has convicted their hearts about. It is this joy that so comforted Paul. And you're going to see the word "comfort" and the word "rejoice" almost used interchangeably. It was something that he was so rejoicing that it was such a comfort to him to hear that the Corinthian church truly ended up being exactly what he thought they were. They came forth; they dealt with those men who had caused the problem. And Paul is so rejoicing in their repentance.

Paul rejoiced because their repentance was a testimony to the whole church as to who they were

There are three things that I think he rejoices about in these last several verses. First of all, he rejoiced because their repentance was a testimony to the whole church as to who they were. It was a testimony to the whole church, a believer who is walking with the Lord Jesus, allowing Jesus to be Jesus in his life, that's what we call living grace around here, will be motivated by the Spirit of God living in him to make every effort to win back the relationship that has been broken with his fellow believers.

If you're walking in the spirit you cannot stand a broken relationship. People that are deceived and hard-headed and will not yield to Christ, they can better deal with it than the person that lives in the purity of relationship with God. And this was true of Paul and as we said the last time, the most spiritual person in a broken relationship is the first one to drop anchor. When he wrote that third, tough letter it was out of love and concern for them. Now, in the worldly way of thinking he had every right to be vindictive and to call names because of how these individuals within the church had treated him. But God's love, this is what God's love does.

I hear people talk about being filled with the Spirit and they do miracles and see people healed. Good grief, the true miracle of being filled with the Spirit of God is a love that nobody can dismiss. That's what God does. He floods your heart with a love that's God's love in us; that's the fruit of God's Spirit. And that love manifested in Paul wrapped itself around every word that he wrote to them in that third letter. Actually, if you've studied Paul's epistles you see this through every one of them, even Galatians, because you have to really love somebody to tell them those difficult things.

Paul showed so much love and sensitivity to them that he did not even expose the name of the individual who had caused him so much hard. He says in verse 12, "it was not for the sake of the offender." That was not the purpose of his letter. Paul obviously knew the offender's name and obviously knew the offender, but he chose not to identify him in the letter. You see, since this letter was sent to the whole church he knew that to expose this man in this particular situation was not what God would have him to do. So out of love and respect for the man, this is Christ in us, he was not caustic and he was not vindictive whatsoever.

He also says, "nor for the sake of the one offended." There is so much discussion as to who the offended is in this text. I personally believe it is Paul himself. And he almost dismisses himself and puts it in such a third person nobody would even identify it as him. Paul didn't mention his own name; Paul didn't mention the name of the one he knew very well that had caused him the problem because that was not the intent of the letter. Again, Paul didn't write this letter, and I want to make sure you're hearing that, out of a vindictive spirit whatsoever because he had been hurt. That's not why he wrote the letter. His intension in writing that third tough letter to the Corinthians was because he only wanted their relationship to be healed once again and he knew they had to repent and make it right with God first, then the group of them could walk together. He knew that for it to be healed they would have to repent and their repentance would be a testimony to the whole church. They had to deal with these people that had caused the problem.

We must see this. I want to say it as much as I can possibly say it. A believer who is filled with the Spirit of God is never caustic or is never vindictive or competitive when he has to confront the people that he loves. Let me ask you a question to be sure you're with me tonight. How many of you have ever made the mistake of being that way, vindictive or caustic in how you confronted someone who has hurt you? Anyone besides me?

We were in Mississippi for quite awhile and I was in youth and recreation work. The newspaper made a mistake in their accounting and they thought that we had not paid a bill. Now you know when you've paid a bill. I wrote the check. I knew we'd paid the bill. And we get a letter one day that says "You have not sent your payment, it is late." It's really interesting how they write you these very nice letters. The first one was actually pretty nice. The second one, they change colors. Have you ever noticed that? If you're late on a payment it goes from white to another color. Of course the blood red is what you don't want to see.

And they wrote us that third letter. I kept saying, "Oh, don't worry about it. These are good people, they've made a mistake and they'll figure it out." Wrong. As a matter of fact, they called one night collect to my house. My wife was there and she answered the phone thinking it was one of our children calling and they just raked her over the coals for this bill. Well, I came home and found out about it, the Christian that I was, and I completely lost it. I went up in the attic and I looked and I looked until I found that receipt of that check. I found it. Buddy, I had a photocopy made of that check. I was going to keep it in case they came after me again and I wrote a letter on our church stationary and you talk about vindictive and caustic! I'm embarrassed that I would write that kind of letter. And I signed it and I sent it to them.

We were building a brand new activities building and I had ordered all the stuff in it, coordinated the colors, everything. That was the gym, the bowling lanes, the whole thing, I was running that thing. And we had a big celebration one day because we built the new auditorium at the same time. And we were having an open house for the whole community. I'm standing over here and this lady walks into the room with me and she says, "Wayne, did you write a letter to somebody at the newspaper?" Now, how would she know that? And I said, "Well, yeah." She said, "Do you see the man standing over there by the punchbowl? That's one of the finest Christians to ever come out of this church. Wayne, he works at that newspaper. It was his desk that your letter fell on and I think you would probably want to walk over and say something to him." It wasn't but 20 steps, but that's the longest walk I've ever walked in my life. That was about a five mile walk to get over there. And I felt so stupid.

Isn't it interesting that when you're walking after the flesh you've got to defend what the flesh comes up with? But when you're tenderized by the Spirit of God, you're not caustic, you're not vindictive, you're not competitive, there's a love in what you do that is absolutely tremendous. God filled him with His love. He makes every effort to restore the relationship, even though he had to do the hard thing, and telling the church what they hadn't done to correct these people in the church that had caused Paul so much harm.

Well, they repented. And, you know, when God's people see sin and God's people see their own flesh and God is the only One who can reveal it to them, it sends a clear testimony to the whole church. First of all, who God is, but secondly who they are. Yes, these are really believers. These are people that want to walk with God. It vindicates them as he said earlier. This is what he meant when he said he approved you to be innocent. Not in the fact that they hadn't done anything wrong, but in the fact that these are the ones repenting. The ones that they had to deal with should have been the ones doing it, but the church themselves saw that they had done wrong and they were willing to repent.

So he says in verse 12, "So although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender, nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God." Now this is the New American Standard rendering. It reads it and tells us that Paul is saying "I wrote to you so that you would repent and turn back to me and that your earnestness on our behalf would be seen by the whole church in the sight of God."

Now let's take that real slow because I want to make sure you're seeing what he's saying here: "but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you." The word "you" is plural, "you all." The whole church. "I want to be vindicated in front of the whole church. I want the people to be able to look at the church and to see that you really are what you say you are." And then he adds, "in the sight of God." That's a beautiful picture of what exactly happened and it fits the text in a most marvelous way.

You see, the people that are true and genuine are the ones who always make the greatest concession. And they were willing to

repent. They saw that they didn't cause this thing to happen, but they didn't do anything about it and they should have. And that's sin. And they repented. Now it's interesting that there are two different translations here. From the New American Standard and then from the King James and the New King James. They don't render it that way. They change it and let me show you what they do. I'm going to read from the New King James version which is an updated version of the King James. It just changes the language and makes it a little more modern. I want you to see the difference.

Now on the New American Standard, "so that your earnestness might be seen and made manifest in the sight of God." But look at verse 12 here in the King James, "Therefore although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you." You say, "What do you do in a situation like that?" You've got two different Greek texts and you've got two different translations that come out of it. The word for "care" in the last part of the verse is the Greek word *spoude*, which means "earnest effort in your behalf." I think that both translations tell us the story. I like the NAS better because it shows that the church itself by their repentance proved to be who they said they were. But at the same time, it was because of the earnest effort on Paul's part that God used that to bring conviction to their hearts.

Their response was such a testimony to the whole church, and it was so genuine, and Paul says it was in the sight of God it was so genuine. This true repentance caused Paul to be comforted and to rejoice. Again, "So although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender, nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. For this reason we have been comforted."

So Paul's rejoicing was the result of God's using the earnest effort on his part, led by the Spirit of God. We're talking about a person who walks with God to bring them to a repentance which became a testimony to the whole church in the area, that they were genuine, that they were actually who Paul knew all along that they were. "So although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender, nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God. For this reason we have been comforted."

I want you to think on something. There are a lot of things we could say about this. I want you to think about something that was on my heart while I studied this. Do you realize that every major revival that has ever taken place in church history started when God revealed to people's heart their sin and that they were willing to repent of that sin and that repentance spread and the whole church rejoiced and others then became honest with God. And it's that willingness to repent. They really hadn't caused the wrong; they just hadn't done anything to right it. And yet they repented. It is so important for us to understand this in the vocabulary of the believer in the US.

It seems like what I run into so often is people are saying, "I want Jesus to be good to me and I want to feel blessed and I want to feel good." And God says, "You can, but you've got to repent first. There's sin in your life and for you to have a witness to people as to who you really are, if you're not willing to deal with the sin, then you have no testimony to anybody. But when you're willing to deal with sin and repent it gives room for revival to start within God's people."

I went to Asbury Seminary for a term. I was at Southern Seminary at the time and I went over there during the Christmas months, the winter months. And you get credit for it just like if you were going to your own seminary for that. And while I was there the man who was a part of the Asbury Revival was my teacher. And he wrote the book, *One Divine Moment*, and he said it all started in a chapel service of all places. And they had the president of their class was to get up and lead in prayer and to introduce the speaker and then to sit down. And they said they had such a prayer time before they started chapel that day that he began to get under conviction and God was revealing sin in his life of the grossest kind of immorality and he was supposed to get up and lead in prayer. And they said he walked up to the rostrum and he began to ask the people to bow their heads and the next sound that the people heard was the brokenness of a young man whom God had just revealed to his heart what he had done. And that young man began to break and confess his sins and to plead with God and to ask God to forgive him and to cleanse him of that unrighteous act in his life. And when he was so broken in front of his peers and the faculty that was there, another one stood up and began to confess sin in his life and that chapel period that started in mid-morning at Asbury Seminary lasted either 10-11 weeks. It never stopped.

In fact, Paul Harvey made a journey down there just to find out what in the world was going on. It became nationwide known over night. Why, because God's people were willing to listen to the hard things and they were willing to let God the Holy Spirit convict them of sin and they were willing to repent of that sin and make it right with God and with man. That's a part of what Christian life is all about. You know, I'm just standing up here. Sometimes I want to make people laugh; maybe they'll like me more. Or maybe I can tell funny stories and we can just have a great time. Christianity is so much fun. Oh my friend, it is the most joyful life you could ever have but it's only to the degree you're willing to go to the cross and repent of the sin that God reveals in your heart that you'll ever know what that joy is all about.

There's a cross standing between us and what we're looking for and what we know that God has promised to us. So the apostle Paul rejoices. This church has shown themselves to be exactly what they said they were. They were believers. Even though they

weren't the ones causing the problems, they weren't the ones solving them either. And they hadn't done what Paul had asked them to do up until that point, but now they have and they've come around the bend and now their relationship with Paul can be right. And this spreads like wildfire. It's contagious to see real people deal with real sin and to see God work in their hearts.

Paul rejoiced because their repentance was a mighty witness to Titus

No wonder Paul rejoiced. No wonder Paul rejoiced. But the second thing that he rejoiced over was because their repentance was a mighty witness to Titus. You've got to understand that Paul had a bunch of men around him that he mentored and disciplined. He calls Timothy his son in the faith. He calls Titus his child in a common faith when he writes the book of Titus. He's a special guy. Even though Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthians, it was Titus who took it to them. That's a tough situation. No one knew how they would receive the letter. Paul had believed that they would, but their right response to the letter, just like Paul had figured, refreshed Titus and this caused Paul to rejoice.

Verse 13, "And besides our comfort, we also rejoice even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all." Now you know that Paul loved Titus and certainly he feared for him going into this very difficult situation. I mean it was difficult at best. But how relieved he must have been at the good news of how they responded, not only to the letter but also to Titus. When God works repentance in the hearts of His people, everybody is blessed. He says, "And besides our comfort, we rejoiced even much more for the joy of Titus."

Paul rejoiced to see Titus so full when he got to him. It goes on to say, "because his spirit has been refreshed," by you all." You know what the word "refreshed" is? It's the word *anapauo* and it means "to give somebody rest." It's a beautiful picture. Get the picture: Titus like Paul was as anxious probably as Paul was to how the Corinthians would receive not only the letter, but him. His fears however were put to rest. He was refreshed by the beautiful way in which the church repented.

Now I want to tell you, this is in between the lines, but I think Titus was probably just as concerned not for himself but for Paul. Paul had boasted to him, "I really do believe that they're going to hear this. I believe in who they really are and I believe they'll respond rightly." It says in verse 14, "For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth." And Titus was so clearly blessed by their repentance and by the way they received him, as Paul says in verse 15, "And his affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling."

The word "affection" is the word that is the deepest word for affection you can get in Scripture. They would go into the internal organs to try to describe the depth of all emotion and that the word. The memory of how they all obeyed caused his affection to grow for them. Titus just fell in love with them. Titus could have embraced them. The word for "obedience," he says "the obedience of you all," is the word *hupakoe*. That's a very important word. It's a word that is never used of a wife to a husband, that's a different word. It's a submission that asks no questions. It is used of a child to a parent; it's also used of us to the Lord. In other words, when we come before Him we ask no questions.

And he says this was the evidence that they were genuine in Corinth. This is such a work of God in a person's life. If you want to see a person vindicated as to who they are, you want to see a person proven to be a believer, there are many ways. But one of the ways is when God convicts him, his heart is broken and he's willing to repent and forsake his sin and he's willing to see that radical change in his life. He's willing to obey no matter what God tells him to do. That's the work of God in a person's heart.

Well, what Paul wrote to them God used to the point that they were willing to obey without question. They received Titus with fear and trembling. What does that tell you? It tells you that God had already gone before Titus and that's a beautiful principle. They were already expecting Titus somehow. There was fear and trembling when he came to them and God had prepared their hearts. So Paul rejoiced in their testimony of their repentance to the whole church. They proved themselves throughout that they were who they said they were. They were God's people. But he also rejoiced in their witness to Titus, his disciple, the one he mentored, the one who was a co-worker with him. Paul was so overwhelmed with the joy that he saw in Titus. You know what repentance does? When you see people repent, that's a work of God beyond anything that a human can understand.

Paul rejoiced because their repentance was such an encouragement to him

Finally, he rejoiced because of their repentance; it was such an encouragement to him. Remember, he was flat emotionally and flat mentally. He says in verse 16, "I rejoice that in everything I have confidence in you. I love that word "rejoice." It's the word *chairō*, and it comes from the root word of a little lamb that is just so full of joy and glee it just bounces around. And what that tells me is that you can't hide this kind of joy. This is just something that is contagious. When you see God's people act like God's people, when you see them not run because they hear the hard things but respond in repentance in their hearts, it just over joys the one, like the apostle Paul here. He couldn't hide it.

It's in the present tense which means he was just walking around and he was just filled with gladness because of their repentance.

Don't you know that the Corinthians loved receiving this news from Paul? This letter, 2 Corinthians that we have, we only have two of the letters, this is a response to their response. He's writing them back. That's why he has the beautiful things to say to them in this epistle.

He says that "in everything." I want to teach you a word: the word "everything" means "everything." It's the word *pas*, but it's more than what you think. When he says "that in everything" he means each and every thing as you look at it and then when you turn and look back, the whole of it when you sum it up together. So in every thing: their attitude toward Titus, their response to the hard letter and their willingness to bow down before God and to yield to His fullness in their life. Everything, "that in everything I have confidence in you." They blessed his socks off and he wants them to know it.

What a difference from the first three letters that he had written to them. This is amazing. This is really a turning point so much in his telling the story of what has happened in Corinth. Their repentance had not only been an example to the whole church, a terrific witness to Titus, but it had restored Paul's confidence in them as being true believers. The word for "confidence" is the word *tharreo*, which means "to be full of hope and confidence," which also means to be full of good cheer because of this. A similar word means to be revived, to have life breathed back into someone. It's like when somebody has lost their oxygen from under water and somebody gives them artificial respiration and breathes into them and that breath comes back in and they're able to breathe again. The life is back. It's the same idea.

Remember that Paul was flat emotionally and mentally because of the situation there at Corinth and this had brought brand new life back into him. They had repented. They had done exactly what he thought they would do. They had dealt with the individuals. Earlier in 2 Corinthians he talks about it. "You've gone far enough. Slow down, love the man, and don't go too far with him." It's a beautiful picture of what they had done.

You see, when the church of Corinth was birthed, when Paul when over to Corinth for the Isthmian games. Corinth sets on an isthmus; it connects northern and southern Greece. And they had the Olympic Games in Athens but they had the Isthmian games there on that little piece of land that connected those two major bodies of land. And Corinth set right there in the middle of it. And he went over to make tents, probably for the Isthmian games. That was what he did; that was how he made his money for his ministry. He championed that you ought to pay your pastor but he chose to be the exception to the rule. He didn't want anybody to ever think that he was out to get people's money in what he did.

And there when he went were Priscilla and Aquila, and when Timothy and his buddies came down he went over to the synagogue and started teaching and stopped making tents. And the first person that got saved was Crispus, the leader of the synagogue. And when that happened the church of Corinth was birthed. Paul didn't go to Corinth to start a church; Paul went to Corinth to make tents. But God wanted a church birthed there in Corinth.

And God had done such a work, Paul loved these people so much, they were full of the oppression of the humanism around them and all the false teachers it broke his heart when they bought in to it. It broke his heart when they remained silent and wouldn't do what they knew to do when this situation occurred there. But now new life had breathed back into him. His confidence was back in the fact that these truly were God's people. What a testimony their repentance was to the whole church and to Titus and to the apostle Paul.

I don't like to say these hard things, but right relationships require repentance. Somebody is wrong. Somebody has got to face what they've done wrong and you can't have the two walking together until you have both on both sides willing to go and do whatever is necessary. It rejuvenates the whole church. But I'm going to tell you something sad in my mind. Don't want to leave you on a downer but I want to leave you thinking. The sad thing is that in Christianity today, people want to take repentance out of their vocabulary. It's "what's in it for me," rather than "am I willing to deal with what God wants me to deal with."

I want to read you a statement by AW Tozer. Tozer wrote this a long time ago: "There is an evil which in its affect upon the Christian religion may be more distractive than Communism, Romanism, and liberalism combined. It is the glaring disparity between theology, what one believes, and practice among professing Christians. So wide is this gulf which separates theory from practice in the church that an inquiring stranger who changes upon both would scarcely dream that there was any relation between the two of them. An intelligent observer of the human scene, who heard the Sunday morning message and later watched the Sunday afternoon conduct of those who heard it would conclude that he had been examining two distinct and contrary religions. It appears to me that too many Christians want to enjoy the thrill of feeling right but are not willing to endure the inconvenience of being right. And so the divorce between theory and practice becomes permanent in fact. Truth sets forsaken and grieves until her professed followers come home for a brief visit. But she sees them depart when the bills come due."

And, folks, we're living in a time when repentance is so needed in the church of Jesus Christ. Let me ask you a question as we close. What is it that God has been convicting you about lately in your life, revealing to you that is wrong? How have you responded to that? Have you seared your conscience so that it doesn't hurt you as much as it did the first time God revealed it? Be real careful

because to walk with God involves dealing with sin, repenting from that sin, in order to enjoy the fullness of what God has on the flip side. I don't like it, you don't like it. It's part of it: we've got to put that word back in our vocabulary if we're going to be the church God wants us to be. And remember, He's the One who initiates it. He's the One who brings it about in our lives.