

SECOND CORINTHIANS

7:2-16

Introduction

“Repent!” is a command you normally associate with altar calls that urge unbelievers to get right with God. The gospel preaching in the Book of Acts is to “repent and be converted.” Repentance is “a change of heart which leads to a turning **from sin and to God.**” Repentance doesn’t save you; but you can’t be saved without repentance.

Our text in Second Corinthians is about repentance... *But it is not an altar call to unbelievers.* It is a wake-up call to believers! It urges believers to repent and to adopt repentance as a constant attitude of the heart.

Believers are frequently urged to repent in the Scriptures. For example: Four of the seven churches listed in the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ were commanded to repent by Jesus. Believers need to repent, not to remain saved, but to restore their fellowship with God.

The Corinthians had allowed sin to go unchecked in their midst. One of their members had been living in open, unashamed incest with his father’s wife. Paul had urged them to repent. They did repent; this chapter is a testimony to their change of heart which led to a turning from sin and to God.

This text also provide us insight into the process God uses to produce repentance. We’ll organize our thoughts around three points: #1 Let Reproof Lead You To Remorse, #2 Let Remorse Lead You To Repentance, and #3 Let Repentance Lead You To Rejoicing.

#1 Let Reproof Lead

You To Remorse

(v2-8)

There was a Christian in Corinth who was openly living in the sexual sin of incest. Paul had urged the congregation to discipline the man when he wrote First Corinthians. But the man committing incest was not expelled from the Corinthian congregation, so Paul made a second visit to Corinth. There the man assaulted him verbally by challenging his apostolic authority to exercise discipline in the church. Paul was deeply hurt and, unable to solve the dilemma, returned to Ephesus. Upon his arrival in Ephesus, Paul wrote such a severe letter that the Corinthians could have turned completely away from him. This letter is lost to us and is not a part of the New Testament. Titus delivered the letter to the church in Corinth. On the basis of this letter and the influence of Titus, the congregation changed its attitude, took action, and disciplined the unrepentant man.

In the meantime, Paul had traveled from Ephesus to Macedonia, where he anxiously waited for Titus to tell him about the effect of the severe letter (7:5-16). Titus informed him that the Corinthians had disciplined the man, who as a result had himself repented. Paul expressed both relief and joy that the critical situation in the Corinthians church had passed. In chapter two of Second Corinthians he encouraged the congregation to forgive the repentant sinner and to restore him. Now, in chapter seven, he reviews the process that God used to produce repentance.

The process God used began with a reproof from Paul in the form of the severe letter he wrote them. Notice verse eight, which says,

2 Corinthians 7:8 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while.

His severe letter was a reproof. To “reprove” means *to admonish, to rebuke, to find fault with*. Simply put, Paul pointed out their sin.

We like to joke about living in a “politically correct” society. People are not short; they are “vertically challenged.” People are not bald; they are “folically challenged.” You get the idea.

Christians are the first to criticize this softening of language – *until you try to reprove them for their sin!* As long as you are talking about unbelievers it's OK to be straightforward. But the moment you start pointing out sin to a believer you are accused of being judgmental and mean.

One of the first things people do in order to resist reproof is to accuse the reprover of having impure or ulterior motives. Paul clears himself by saying,

2 Corinthians 7:2 Open *your hearts* to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.

2 Corinthians 7:3 I do not say *this* to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.

2 Corinthians 7:4 Great *is* my boldness of speech toward you, great *is* my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.

2 Corinthians 7:5 For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside *were* conflicts, inside *were* fears.

Who would want to be in Paul's position? He had brought them the gospel at great personal cost and sacrifice. He was "troubled on every side." He experienced "conflicts" and "fears." He had no physical "rest." Add to that he was being accused of "wrongdoing," "corruption," and "cheating."

Still, he acted out of love for them. He did not "condemn" them. He "boasted" about their good qualities; he remained "joyful" despite his "tribulation." No matter what the Corinthians did to him or said about him, they were "in his heart to die together and to live together." Paul had the *right* and the *responsibility* to reprove them.

It **is** possible for someone to reprove you out of their own impure motives. But it is also possible for you to ascribe impure motives in order to resist the reproof. Paul is encouraging you to analyze your reprover, not to attack him or her.

I can only use myself as an example. I am not the apostle Paul! I have not, and probably will never, experience the things he did for the sake of the gospel. I can't take off my shirt and show you the stripes I've received. I will tell you that I didn't go into the ministry for the glory... or for the money... or for the security. I can tell you that many of the people I have had the right and the responsibility to reprove

over the years have attacked me. Reproof is mostly despised in the modern church.

If you will allow it to, reproof leads you to remorse:

2 Corinthians 7:6 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,

2 Corinthians 7:7 and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

The Corinthians had received the severe letter and its reproof. Rather than mistreat Titus, they “comforted” him. They communicated to Titus a “zeal” to see Paul again. Mostly, they reacted with “mourning” – with remorse over the sin they had tolerated in their congregation.

2 Corinthians 7:8 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while.

Paul’s words wounded them, but only for a good result. He regretted having to reprove them. But he did not regret reproving them for their own good. His reproof led them to remorse, which in turn led them to repentance.

#2 Let Remorse Lead You To Repentance (v9-12)

Remorse is not the goal. It is the goad. It goads you towards repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:9 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

2 Corinthians 7:10 For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

There is a *godly* remorse, and there is a *worldly* remorse. There is the worldly remorse of Judas, who went out and hanged himself. And there is the godly remorse of Peter, which produced repentance leading to salvation.

Godly remorse produces repentance leading to salvation when you can observe the following reactions in your life:

2 Corinthians 7:11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what* clearing of yourselves, *what* indignation, *what* fear, *what* vehement desire, *what* zeal, *what* vindication! In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

You must be able to “observe... diligence.” This is “eagerness” to confront sin. In the case of the Corinthians, they had been tolerating sin; after the reproof they eagerly confronted it.

You must be able to “observe... clearing.” They wanted to clear themselves of sin. This is the honest confession of sin *as sin* in order to seek and receive God’s forgiveness.

You must be able to “observe... indignation.” The Greek word denotes a pain that you cause to yourself. This is your personal agitation at having been so deceived as to fall into and continue in sin.

You must be able to “observe... fear.” This is the fear of God in the sense that you understand that you have displeased your heavenly Father Who loves you and has only your good in mind.

You must be able to “observe... vehement desire.” The word is *longing*. It is your longing to see the whole matter resolved in a godly manner.

You must be able to “observe... zeal.” You act immediately, without putting off doing the right thing.

You must be able to “observe... vindication.” This can be translated *punishment*, or *readiness to see justice done*, or *avenging of wrong*. It is taking the further step of making right anything or anyone that was wronged while you were in sin.

These things taken together “prove” that you are “clear.” They are the reactions of true repentance.

Here is what Paul is saying:

Reproof leads you to remorse. If you **do not** observe these reactions, yours is only a worldly remorse that produces death. If you **do** observe these reactions, yours is a godly remorse that produces repentance leading to salvation.

Paul is addressing believers. By “death” he means the loss of fellowship with God, not eternal death. By “salvation” he means the continued enjoyment of your fellowship with God.

Do you enjoy fellowship with the Lord? If not, it could be the result of a lack of repentance. Paul thinks so.

#3 Let Repentance Lead You To Rejoicing (v12-16)

Skim these verses and you see the words “rejoiced,” “joy,” and “rejoice.” Rejoicing and joy are the result of repentance. You can identify at least three rejoicings in these closing verses: Rejoicing over *restoration*, rejoicing over being *refreshed*, and rejoicing at being *revived*.

Rejoicing over restoration:

2 Corinthians 7:12 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.

Dealing with sin through reproof, remorse, and repentance goes far beyond the immediate situation. Its effects spill over into the whole congregation. There is rejoicing over the restoration of fellowship with one another in the sight of God.

Rejoicing over being refreshed:

2 Corinthians 7:13 Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.

2 Corinthians 7:14 For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true.

2 Corinthians 7:15 And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him.

Titus must have been concerned about being the messenger who delivered the severe letter from Paul. As it turned out, both he, Paul, and the Corinthians ended up refreshed as they ministered one to another. There was mutual “comfort,” “boasting,” and “obedience.”

Rejoicing at being revived:

2 Corinthians 7:16 Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.

A remarkable transformation had taken place in Corinth. They had slipped into carnality; now they had returned to a place where Paul could say “I have confidence in you in everything.” Their repentance had led them to rejoicing – to a return to the joy and enjoyment of walking with the Lord.

In one sense that is what revival is – a return to the joy and enjoyment of walking with the Lord. It is hampered and hindered by sin. God sends reproof; reproof leads to remorse; remorse leads to repentance; repentance leads to rejoicing.

Conclusion

Repentance and faith are necessary for you to be saved. It is not your repentance that saves you; but there is no salvation without the forsaking of your sin. Repentance in one hand, and faith in the other, hand-in-hand, lead you into the salvation of Jesus Christ.

The gospel Jesus Christ preached was a command to “Repent, and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Since you are commanded by God to do it, therefore you may do it.

Once you are saved, you find that repentance is not a momentary act but the constant attitude of the regenerated heart. Charles Spurgeon writes,

“An old saint, on his sick bed, [said]...’Lord, sink me as low as hell in repentance; but... lift me as high as heaven in faith.’ A man may loathe and detest himself, and all the while he may know that Christ is able to save, and has saved him. In fact, this is how true Christians live; they repent as bitterly for sin as if they knew they should be damned for it; but they rejoice as much in Christ as if sin were nothing at all. O, how blessed it is to know where these two... meet, the stripping of repentance, and the clothing of faith!”¹

¹ Sermon #460

Let the Lord reprove you – through His Scriptures, by His servants – that you might end up revived once again, rejoicing in the joy of your salvation.