2 Corinthians 7:5

Comfort Through Titus — Godly Sorrow and Its Fruit

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 7:5–16

“For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless, God that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me, so that I rejoiced the more. For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent; for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.

Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you! Yea, what clearing of yourselves! Yea, what indignation! Yea, what fear! Yea, what vehement desire! Yea, what zeal! Yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. Therefore we were comforted in your comfort; yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all. For if I have boasted anything to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all

things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth. And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him. I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things."

Paul's Troubles Without and Fears Within

We certainly learn in this passage that Paul was not a piece of unfeeling steel. He felt these things very deeply. There were problems without, and fears within. One of the fears was that in the very effort to recover the Corinthians, it might lead to their permanent estrangement from him — which was deeply troubling, yet God had come in with encouragement.

There is a woman healed by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels who was bent over so that she could not look up. The account of her meeting with the Lord that day is that he healed her so that she could look up — he caused her not only to look down. It says in our verse that the flesh had no rest. Man is more than flesh; there is also the soul and the spirit, and the spirit is the highest part, that which has to do with God. The preceding verse says, "I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation" — that would be the spirit's side, and that ought to have continued on an even keel, whatever the outcome for him of the report from Corinth. The man who knows not Christ often finds that he can only look down at the troubles that disturb the flesh, and when trouble comes his spirit is wrought upon and he becomes angry or depressed. But that is not the Christian's portion. Paul was a heavenly man; he lived in the truth of a new creation. Verse 4 and verse 5 actually describe two different times — before and after Titus' arrival — and the verse that precedes speaks of the spirit's side that should have persisted through.

The Coming of Titus — Three Cords of Encouragement

God comforts those that are cast down — and he comforted the apostle by the coming of Titus, and not by his coming only, but by the consolation Titus himself had received from them. It shows how one Christian can be the source of much encouragement to another. Titus was a true yoke-fellow in service, and it was very encouraging to see him safely returned. We may read in chapter 2 verse 13 that Paul had no rest in his spirit because he found not Titus his brother at Troas, and so he took leave and crossed over into Macedonia — putting himself closer to Corinth, out of a sense of urgency and desire to hear about the saints and how his words had been received.

There are three distinct sources of encouragement that Paul speaks of: the coming of Titus himself; the things that Titus related; and the joy of Titus. At the very least, that is a threefold cord. The Spirit of God had worked at Corinth. Titus was received, and a work was wrought in them, and there was a changed attitude toward the apostle Paul — not in every one of them, for he speaks of the many having taken the action. Unanimity is not a scriptural notion about assembly actions; it was of the many. The one put out might not agree, and there might be others who hold back. But they had received Titus, and the Spirit had bowed their hearts to the epistle, at least the many, and there was a changed attitude.

Earnest Desire, Mourning, and Fervent Mind

When he told us of your earnest desire — Darby translates it, your ardent desire. That is quite a warming up to go from all the complaining to having an ardent desire toward the apostle Paul. It was a work of the Spirit of God going on in their souls. As Isaiah 26:8 says: “Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee.” That should never be a lukewarm, take-it-or-leave-it sort of desire. An ardent desire is what the Holy Spirit produces in the believer.

The ardent desire, the mourning, and the fervent mind are all three toward heaven. The mourning was not yet the mourning over the toleration of sin specifically — that is mentioned earlier. But they had good reason to mourn over their attitude toward Christ's sent apostle, their father in the faith, who had been with them for perhaps a year and a half. When one compares the state they had gotten into with that of the Thessalonians, with whom Paul was probably only three weeks, and compares what he writes to each — three weeks versus a year and a half — something was very, very wrong at Corinth. It involved a despising of one of Christ's sent ones, and particularly the apostle to the Gentiles. They had reason to mourn over that, because it was sinful on their part.

There is nothing of a Laodicean character in any of these three things — the ardent desire, the mourning, and the zeal. They all bespeak the real earnestness of the soul.

Paul and the Messenger — Acts 14

Their continued rejection of the apostle Paul would have entailed the rejection of his inspired epistles. They would have been despising the Word of God from the hand of the apostle Paul. So their newfound zeal toward him was bound up with the reception of what he had written. Titus was the bearer and associate of the epistle, but the real messenger from God was the one who wrote it. The messenger and the message are bound together; the apostle Paul had to be viewed entirely differently by them in order for the Spirit to cause them to bow to the epistle he had written.

This calls to mind Acts 14, when Paul was stoned at Lystra and drawn out of the city, supposed dead. As the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city. The disciples made Paul a center, stood around him, focused on him, and the result was that he revived. Every time in Scripture one finds the brethren standing around the apostle Paul like that, it is a little expression of

earnest desire toward him, of mourning in sympathy with his troubles, and of fervent mind toward him. And in 2 Timothy, Paul singles out what happened at that place as something that was supposed to have touched Timothy and given a special impact to his soul — so it is not merely a plain account but one singled out for emphasis, with a lesson in it for us.

Regret and Repentance — A Distinction

In verse 8 he speaks of having grieved them with a letter, and says he does not repent — though he did repent. He had seen the fruit it bore, and it was worth it. The regret he had was not because there was anything unsound in what he wrote; he did not regret the truth he had expressed. Rather, he was much afraid of a permanent estrangement as a consequence of his letter. If the truth of God does not bow those who receive it and brings estrangement instead, that is very regrettable — but the problem would be with those who received it, not with the apostle or the truth of the epistle.

The distinction between regret and repentance is important here. Darby does not use the word repent in his translation of the verse, and rightly so, because repentance in its full scriptural sense is taking sides with God against oneself. Was it a matter of the apostle taking sides with God against himself for having written that letter? By no means. It really was a matter of personal regret, not repentance. His concern was over a possible estrangement, not over anything amiss in what he had written.

The human heart is capable of holding more than one feeling at the same time. A parent who imposes necessary discipline may feel great personal anguish about seeing a child go through what they are going through, may have concerns about the effect it will have, without for a moment regretting that they were faithful and imposed the discipline. As long as the loving heart and the firm hand are together, one might yet have an anxious thought, something that one regrets,

without ever having to take sides with God against oneself. That is very much the construct here.

> *God that comforteth those that are cast down comforted us by the coming of Titus.*