

False teachers had sown doubt about Paul's apostleship and authority, so Paul had to write a letter of correction clarifying the error of their teaching and rebuking the Corinthians for falling for it. Paul has expressed earlier in this chapter that in all their affliction he is overflowing with joy because of the pride he has in the Corinthians. He reminded them of what his team endured for the sake of the gospel. He told them how encouraged he was at how they responded to his harsh letter of correction, and how godly grief had brought them to repentance. By being receptive to his letter and to Titus they had grown in their faith and did not lose ground in their faith journey. (See verses 1-9.)

¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. 2 Corinthians 7:10 This is one of those defining verses that we often look back to for clarification. I like to refer to these kinds of statements as declarations of eternal truth. These are the passages you underline in your Bible and go back to for guidance.

There are two kinds of grief. Godly grief is grief resulting from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. We know that we have offended God by our actions. Because we love Him for all He has done for us, and we are grieved at our weak and ungrateful behavior. We allow our old nature to dictate our actions, and then we regret it and are grieved at our own weakness. That is godly sorrow that causes us to turn to the Lord and change our behavior and depend on the Lord's strength to face temptations. That is working out the salvation that is within us with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12ⁱ).

Worldly grief produces death. I know some people who grieve their whole life over a past incident. It is not over sin but rather remorse over things not going the way they wanted them to go. That is self-centered disappointment, grief over circumstances or consequences. It is full of self-pity. Tears are not always a sign of repentance. They can be a sign of self-pity. Those who cling to worldly grief will not give the situation to God and trust Him regarding it. They bring it up whenever they can and think about it often. Our attitudes affect our physical bodies. Worldly grief that we dwell on and will not let go of is one cause of depression and anxiety which affects our physical health and our daily attitude toward life. It can be the result of being unable to forgive ourselves for an embarrassing failure, or it can be blaming God that things did not go our way. Examples of worldly grief include Esau selling his birthright (Hebrews 12:15-17ⁱⁱ) and Judas betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 27:3-5ⁱⁱⁱ). Psalm 32 tells of King David's worldly grief that turned into godly grief.

On Wednesday night we recently came to the dramatic conclusion in the account of Joseph. His father, Jacob, had to send his beloved Benjamin to Egypt with his older brothers so that they would not starve. Jacob said, *"Everything is against me"* (Genesis 42:36^{iv}) He thought Joseph was killed and Simeon was in prison, and he was enduring a famine in which his herds were probably dying. Then he had to risk the life of his favorite son by sending him on the dangerous journey to Egypt. All that he could see was negative. He had worldly grief.

When his sons returned, they told him nothing was what it appeared to be, but he would not believe it. Worldly grief had him convinced God was against him. But earlier

God had spoken to him and promised a descendant from him would bless the world and that God would be with him wherever he went (Genesis 28:14,15^v). He trusted what he could see rather than the promises of God. That is how we put ourselves in a funk. He lived in that funk since Joseph was reported dead twenty plus years earlier.

When he saw the wagons Pharaoh sent his spirit revived as he started to believe Joseph was alive. He had been walking by sight and not by faith. He had to see to believe. But when he saw, he began to have faith again, and that is when his spirit revived (Genesis 45:27^{vi}). Everything was *not* against him. It was really *for* him, to save him, his family, and his herds. God was with him and keeping His Word to provide a descendant who would bless the entire world.

Brothers and sisters, you may be going through difficulties, but you are recipients of the promise given to Jacob (Galatians 3:29^{vii}). You have been blessed by Jacob's descendant Jesus. God has promised that He will never leave you or forsake you as well (Hebrews 13:5^{viii}). Will we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7^{ix})?

After the crucifixion Jesus appeared to the disciples, but Thomas was not with them. He was suffering from worldly grief over Jesus' death. He was not clinging to Jesus' words that He would rise again after three days (Mark 10:34^x). When the disciples told Thomas, he said he would not believe unless he put his finger in the nail holes in Jesus' body (John 20:24,25^{xi}). When Jesus appeared to them the second time, Jesus told Thomas to go ahead and feel the wounds and to not be faithless, but believe (John 20:27^{xii}). Thomas saw, and his worldly grief over Jesus' death was turned to joy. He declared that Jesus is Lord and God. Jesus responded, "*Blessed are those who do not see and yet believe*" (John 20:29^{xiii}).

God wants us to have faith in His Word! He has declared that His plans for you are for your good (Jeremiah 29:11^{xiv}), and that all things, which includes the things that tempt us to have worldly grief, work together for good to those who love God (Romans 8:28^{xv}). Will we have eyes of faith and not wallow in worldly grief because we believe? If we want a blessing, we will. We cannot see what God is doing but we can believe His promises and have faith in His Word.

We should deal with our worldly grief by repenting for not having trusting God and having faith in His forgiveness and love for us (Romans 6:23^{xvi}). That is godly grief, knowing our attitude has been sinful. *Blessed are those who mourn* (Matthew 5:4^{xvii}). That is because it can lead to repentance and restoration. When our minds turn to praise and trust in God, our attitude cannot help but change. It is not easy, but with God we know that all things are possible. It is choosing to believe that God can empower us and change our hearts if we are willing trust Him. We see it throughout the psalms. The psalmist will pour out his grief to God and then end up praising Him for hearing his lament and for the hope that we have in Him. (See an example in Psalm 77.)

Grieving over the loss of a loved one is a process most of us must go through. It is necessary for us to acknowledge the separation we feel, and that is where the grief comes in. But for the believer, we must move on to the hope that we have in Christ. Our hope is that we will see them again and that they are in a much better place. Solomon told us, *² It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. ³ Sorrow is better than laughter,*

for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. ⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. Ecclesiastes 7:2-4 We learn from our time of grieving what is of real importance. A memorial service is one of the few times that we stop to think how short life is and if we are using our time here wisely. But we do not stay in grief, as Solomon said, the godly grief turns to true joy when learn from the sorrow and trust in God.

A biblical example is King David. While he hid his sin against Uriah and with Bathsheba, he said that day and night God's hand was heavy upon him (Psalm 32:3,4^{xviii}). But once Nathan confronted him, he repented which led to salvation (Psalm 32:5^{xix}). The reason Paul could write that this salvation was "without regret" is that we know our sins are removed as far as the east is from the west and remembered no more (Psalm 103:12^{xx}). The grief led to repentance and a restored relationship with God.

¹¹ For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. 2

Corinthians 7:11 Paul's severe letter to the Corinthians bore the fruit of godly grief manifested in seven ways. The first way was in an earnestness they had lost. They were earnest to walk with Jesus by faith rather than the Law. They were also eager to clear themselves of any agreement with the false teacher's attacks on Paul's character. They were indignant about being misled. The fear of the Lord led them to repent of their ungrateful attitude toward Paul and his team. They had a renewed longing for his Spirit led teaching. They were zealous to stand for the truth, and they must have dealt with those who still opposed the gospel of grace with spiritual discipline. Paul had no doubts as to their sincerity for the true gospel and that they no longer entertained a works-based salvation or attacks on Paul that came from the false teachers.

Correction is often hard to receive simply because our old nature is prideful. But if our spirit is ruling over the old nature, we will also have the good fruit that was wrought in the Corinthians. Correction is a blessing! The proverbs tell us that open rebuke is better than secret love and the wounds of a friend are faithful, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful (Proverbs 27:5,6^{xxi}).

Sometimes people can be misguided in their correction. They think they have heard from the Lord or understand all that is involved in a situation and intervene to give correction. If you are in the Spirit, you will sense a correction from the Lord first before someone says something that confirms it. If you are in doubt about what is said, take it to the Lord in prayer and to the Word for clarification.

¹² So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. ^{13a} Therefore we are comforted. 2

Corinthians 7:12,13a Again we see the heart of Paul for the Corinthian believers. He wrote that severe letter not so much to deal with the offender or for himself, but that the church might see the earnestness that they had buried in their hearts. The goal was for the restoration of the whole church to the place from which they had fallen. It was to bring back the zeal and earnestness in their relationship. The fact that it produced the results

that Paul hoped for comforted his heart. That concern that weighed so heavily on him was lifted.

If you are under godly elders and you have backslidden in your earnestness and zeal, know that your elders feel like Paul did. They are praying for you. They are burdened for you. And when you are restored and moving forward again, they are comforted and encouraged. Godly elders live to see each soul moving forward in their faith and passionate about their relationship with the Lord. They long to see that your relationship with Jesus takes first place in your lives and for you to step into your calling. That is their comfort and joy (3 John 1:4^{xxii}).

The word comfort is used frequently in this passage. It is the Greek word *parakaleo*. It is a compound word meaning to come along side and call out. In 1:3^{xxiii} Paul describes God as the God of all comfort and in verse 7 of this chapter Paul declared that God “*comforts the downcast.*” In verse 6^{xxiv} and 13 Paul says his team was *comforted* by the coming of Titus for he told them the good news of how the Corinthians received the letter in all humility. A form of the word is used as a name for the Holy Spirit (John 14:26^{xxv}; 15:26^{xxvi}). And later in this letter Paul tells us to “*comfort one another*” (2 Corinthians 13:11^{xxvii}). We are to come alongside those who are downcast and comfort them just as God does with us. We remind them of the promises of God. We can be the fulfilment of Jesus’ beatitude, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*” Matthew 5:4

13b And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 2 Corinthians 7:13b A blessing that came in addition to the good news about Corinth was the upbeat spirit that Titus brought back. His joy brought Paul’s team joy. They could see by how refreshed he was from his visit to the Corinthians, that what he relayed to them was truly the case. The Corinthians were back on track, rejecting the false teaching and standing in the truth of the grace of the gospel. When we are inspired, we inspire others who inspire others. Do not forget to share testimonies of God at work for they encourage other’s faith and bring joy to their hearts (Psalm 40:5^{xxviii}). Just as love begets love, so joy begets joy. Share those stories of how God intervened and brought you through a trial or clarified to you the truth of the Word. There has never been a time in the history of mankind when people did not need to be refreshed and encouraged. That is because we live in a fallen world. Things are not as they should be. We need reminders of God’s goodness and faithfulness.

14 For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. 2 Corinthians 7:14 Paul had boasted to Titus about the spiritual zeal of the Corinthians. Titus had learned that all that Paul said about them was true. And just as what Paul said to Titus was true, so all that Paul taught the Corinthians was true as well. Paul is reinforcing their understanding that the gospel he presented is objective truth despite what the false teachers had claimed. It is a glorious gospel of the love of God expressed on the cross. It is grace so great that we cannot fathom its fulness. They had received that grace and were growing in it. Even though they had stumbled along the way, their foundation stayed firm, and they got back on track and continued on their journey to Christlikeness (Matthew 7:24^{xxix}). May that ever be true of us all.

¹⁵ And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. 2 Corinthians 7:15 Titus found the Corinthians reverently receptive of God's Word, humbled by having been sidetracked, and ready to receive correction. That made Titus love them all the more. They acted on what he taught them. That is the joy of the elder, to see the Word received and put into action. A congregation can nod in approval and shout "Amen!" But if there is not change, it is all just religious routine. The proof of being receptive is an increase of love for God and our fellow man and obedience to the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶ I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you. 2 Corinthians 7:16 Paul's faith in them was verified by how they received Titus. That gave him cause to rejoice and reinforced his conviction that they were firm in their faith. His time there had borne fruit that remained. They would continue and make disciples who would make disciples (2 Timothy 2:2^{xxx}). The strategic location of Corinth was going to influence many other areas and result in the gospel of Jesus going to other regions of the world. That was Paul's goal, that others would come to know the love and grace of the God who comforts the downcast, who saves sinners, and who makes a wretch His treasure.

This passage of Scripture reminds us of the good that can come out of correction. It also tells us of the relationship between elders and their congregation. While it deals with painful correction, it tells of the joy and comfort that can come from correction. Very few of us enjoy confrontation, but confrontation can be the sincerest form of love. When the truth of the gospel of grace is compromised or distorted, confrontation is necessary. To ignore it would be a lack of love.

Paul has told us he and his whole team despaired of life in Macedonia. There were outward fights and inward fears (7:5^{xxxi}). "But God..." Those are glorious words. The world is fallen and sinful, *but God* sent His only Son into the world to save sinners through His sacrificial death (Ephesians 1:7^{xxxii}). In doing so He made a way to God for all who will have faith in Him. We suffer, *but God* is with us. We have grief, *but God* comforts the downcast. Life can harder than we think we can bear at times, *but God* will make a way to escape (1 Corinthians 10:13^{xxxiii}). He is the God of all comfort, and the God who comforts the downcast. Sometimes He is so gracious as to use you and me as His instrument to comfort others. O what a Savior! Isn't He wonderful! Sing Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Questions:

- 1 What is the background to this passage?
- 2 What is the difference between worldly grief and godly grief?
- 3 How did Jacob experience this? And Thomas?
- 4 What were the seven fruits of godly grief?
- 5 Why do we often balk at correction?
- 6 How is the word "comfort" used in this passage?
- 7 How does a person's comfort affect others around him or her?
- 8 How can we be of comfort to others?
- 9 What is the proof that we have received the Word?
- 10 What is the passage teaching us today?

ⁱ Philippians 2:12 (KJV)

¹² Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

ⁱⁱ Hebrews 12:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; ¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 27:3-5 (ESV)

³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.

^{iv} Genesis 42:36 (NIV)

³⁶ Their father Jacob said to them, “You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!”

^v Genesis 28:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

^{vi} Genesis 45:27 (ESV)

²⁷ But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.

^{vii} Galatians 3:29 (ESV)

²⁹ And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.

^{viii} Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

^{ix} 2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

^x Mark 10:34 (ESV)

³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

^{xi} John 20:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

^{xii} John 20:27 (ESV)

²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”

^{xiii} John 20:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

^{xiv} Jeremiah 29:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

^{xv} Romans 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

^{xvi} Romans 6:23 (ESV)

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

^{xvii} Matthew 5:4 (ESV)

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

^{xviii} **Psalm 32:3-4 (ESV)**

³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

^{xix} **Psalm 32:5 (ESV)**

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

^{xx} **Psalm 103:12 (ESV)**

¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

^{xxi} **Proverbs 27:5-6 (KJV)**

⁵ Open rebuke *is* better than secret love. ⁶ Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful.

^{xxii} **3 John 1:4 (ESV)**

⁴ I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

^{xxiii} **2 Corinthians 1:3 (ESV)**

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

^{xxiv} **2 Corinthians 1:6 (ESV)**

⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

^{xxv} **John 14:26 (KJV)**

²⁶ But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

^{xxvi} **John 15:26 (KJV)**

²⁶ But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:

^{xxvii} **2 Corinthians 13:11 (KJV)**

¹¹ Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

^{xxviii} **Psalm 40:5 (ESV)**

⁵ You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.

^{xxix} **Matthew 7:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

^{xxx} **2 Timothy 2:2 (ESV)**

² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

^{xxxi} **2 Corinthians 7:5 (ESV)**

⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within.

^{xxxii} **Ephesians 1:7 (ESV)**

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

^{xxxiii} **1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)**

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.