

Week 8, 2 Corinthians 7

Hook



Main Point: Believers should be joyful over restored relationships and repentant in their godly grief over sin.

Media: The Disney Pixar film *Inside Out*, released in 2015, explored the emotions that guide a young girl named Riley. The emotions (Joy, Fear, Anger, Disgust and Sadness) live in the control center of Riley’s mind where they advise her through everyday life.¹ *Inside Out* was met with critical acclaim—it won the Oscar for Best Animated Feature Film of the Year and is #51 in all-time highest grossing films with a worldwide gross of over \$870 million.² Play one or both of the clips below for your class:

Meet Sadness: www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5pfng5S8tQ

Meet Joy: www.youtube.com/watch?v=K25d7QIC27c

Describe the difference between the emotion happiness (named “Joy” in Inside Out) and biblical joy.

Describe the difference between the emotion sadness and biblical sorrow.

In what ways is joy helpful in your Christian walk?

In what ways is sorrow helpful in your Christian walk?

¹ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2096673/plotsummary>

² <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/>

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Book

Main Point: Believers should be joyful over restored relationships and repentant in their godly grief over sin.

Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 7 While Paul deals with dark affliction in Macedonia, he asserts his apostolic legitimacy, reaffirms his love for the Corinthians, and also shares why he is so overwhelmingly joyful, even in the midst of terrible circumstances. In this chapter, Paul revisits the “severe letter” he wrote to the Corinthians and tells us how they received it. Paul also explores the biblical paradigm for repentance, the clear marks of true godly grief, and how this model is different from the world’s version of sorrow. Paul also includes interesting details about Titus’ visit to Corinth.

2 Corinthians 7:2–7 [Read]

Sub-Point: Joy in a restored relationship should eclipse the grief of difficult circumstances.

Verses 2–7 In the beginning of this section, Paul renews his appeal for reconciliation between himself and the Corinthians (vv. 2–4). In efforts to help speed the reconciliation, Paul presents three arguments for his integrity:

- “we have wronged no one”* In fact, the opposite is true; Paul was the one wronged, as we will see later in verse 12.
- “we have corrupted no one”* Neither his words nor actions corrupted or fostered immoral behavior.
- “we have exploited no one”* Paul is likely referring to his integrity in financial matters. He has not used his influence for selfish gain, and his involvement with the collection for the poor in Jerusalem was purposefully safeguarded against anyone lining their pockets with the offering.³

While Paul’s argument here is confident and strong, he does not want his hearers to receive it as an attack on their integrity. In the culture at that time, the phrase “to die together and to live together” was a clear affirmation of mutual friendship, loyalty and unbreakable unity even in the face of death itself. Paul, while standing up for his own integrity, is communicating that he

³ Colin G. Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, revised ed., vol. 8, *2 Corinthians: an Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 187.

is on the side of the Corinthians and desires their best (v. 3).⁴ In order to reassure them of his true affection for them, he adds that his intention is not to condemn, and warmly tells them how proud he is of their current behavior (v. 4).

After renewing his appeal for their affection, Paul says that he is “overflowing with joy” (v. 4). One might consider this an unexpected response given his grim depiction of his time in Macedonia, which was filled with restlessness and affliction from all sides (v. 5).

His misery in Macedonia begs the question, *what could possibly be the reason for Paul’s overflowing joy?* Paul was comforted in two ways: (1) Titus was safe and had made it to Macedonia and (2) carrying good and long-awaited news about the state of the once-troubled Corinthians! The Corinthians have mourned over their sin, longed once again for Paul and his leadership, and are filled with zeal for their restored relationship with the apostle.

Now that his apostleship is finally accepted and legitimized in Corinth, this restored relationship not only achieves personal reconciliation and restitution for Paul, but ensures that the Gospel can keep going forward more effectively.

Paul candidly admitted to experiencing conflicts, fears and depression (downcast).⁵ How does someone begin to become more transparent?

How did God comfort Paul in the midst of his sadness? How does your Bible Fellowship strategically seek to comfort those who are experiencing sorrow?

For Paul, seeing the Corinthians repentant and restored overpoweringly eclipses his circumstantial grief in Macedonia. A mended relationship with the Corinthians matters more to him than current success in ministry or even physical well-being.

In society today, it is normal to do away with a difficult or broken relationship and instead focus on making our circumstances easy and prosperous. Why take the time to invest in a broken relationship when you could just move on? Paul clearly believes that relationships matter more than circumstances.

What barriers keep us from restoring relationships?

What value does Scripture place on relationships with other believers? What value does Scripture place on a comfortable, happy life?

⁴ Ibid., 187-188.

⁵ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 571.

What relationships exist in your life that fuel you even when your circumstances are poor?

2 Corinthians 7:8–16 [Read]

Sub-Point: Godly grief leads to true repentance, evidenced by clear change in a believer's life.

Verses 8–10 Paul uncovers the tool God used to bring the Corinthians to repentance: a previous letter written by Paul (v. 8), known by theologians as “the severe letter” that is no longer in existence, as discussed in our Week 3 study.⁶ While we may not know the letter's contents verbatim, we know that it was painful and corrective, as Paul mentions various times, and we know that it achieved its goal.

Paul tells us that yes, the Corinthians were grieved by the letter, but grieved in a good way—a type of grief that led to true repentance and restoration (v. 9). The apostle calls this form of sorrow “godly grief,” and champions it because of the restorative power it wields within believers. Godly grief, according to Paul, “leads to salvation,” meaning it changes a person's heart, secures spiritual vitality in the present, secures eternal life in the future, and leaves no trace of regret on the other side.⁷

The severe letter had done its job, and because of the vitality they gained through repenting, Paul considers them to have “suffered no loss” (v. 9). Through God's work in Paul's many sleepless nights, prayers, letters, and tears, the Corinthians have finally repented. The crisis is over. The rocky relationship between Corinth and Paul is firmly and finally restored.

Paul contrasts “godly grief” with “worldly grief,” which he says produces death (v. 10). This worldly grief is sorrow over the *circumstance* instead of *sin*. Any sorrow endured in a worldly way does not lead to life or salvation, but leads instead to deadly effects like resentment or bitterness.

What is godly grief? Have you experienced it in your life; what results did it produce?

Explain how Paul can say “I do not regret it,” yet also “I did regret it” when it comes to his severe letter (v. 8).

Verses 11–16 In the subsequent verses, Paul expounds on the noticeable effects this repentance achieved in the hearts and actions of the Corinthians. Paul verifies their repentance in seven ways in verse 11: first,

“*what earnestness*” – the church has turned from indifference and become purposefully serious about how they live.

⁶ Harris, 493.

⁷ *Ibid.*

“what eagerness to clear yourselves” – suggests that while the Corinthians had once been apathetic toward slandering and blaming Paul, they now show an obvious enthusiasm to clear *themselves* from blame and also strive to prove their newfound loyalty to the apostle.

“what indignation” – refers to their outrage against the offender who had scandalously denigrated Paul.

“what fear” – signifies their alarm over their behavior and God’s judgment over that behavior.

“what longing” – refers to their fresh affection for Paul. Sixth,

“what zeal” – indicates their passion to honor Paul and rectify the situation. And seventh,

“what punishment” – refers to their willingness to see proper justice carried out against Paul’s offender.^{8 9}

Upon looking at the remarkable effects of their repentance, Paul finishes the verse by declaring them innocent in the matter. He also explains the greater matter going on behind the scenes: The Corinthians restoring their relationship with Paul is something done “in the sight of God” (v. 12). This means that they were ultimately accountable to God, not Paul, for their actions during the entire affair. For Paul, this ordeal is not about being personally vindicated; instead, it’s about the Corinthians being in right standing before God Himself.

Paul finishes this section by affirming Titus’ affection and happiness for the Corinthians (v. 13–16). Upon reading the severe letter, the Corinthians received Titus “with fear and trembling,” suggesting that they finally held great respect for the apostle and his team.¹⁰ Paul rejoices about their treatment of Titus and reaffirms his confidence in the repentant Corinthians.

Why are confession and repentance vital for Christian maturity?

How have you made confession and repentance a consistent part of your spiritual disciplines?

Section Application Genuine repentance produces obvious changes in a person’s life and attitude. Our regular repentance in the Christian life is not authentic when it is not accompanied with obvious signs of change. We, too, must show earnestness about living

⁸ Harris, 494.

⁹ R Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006), 151-152.

¹⁰ Kruse, 194-195.

differently, eagerness to clear ourselves of wrongdoing, indignation over wrong being done, fear of God and the effects of our sin on others, longing for restoration, zeal to correct our offenses, and willingness to practice church discipline should it be necessary in certain cases of unrepentant sin in our churches.

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Took



Main Point: Believers should be joyful over restored relationships and repentant in their godly grief over sin.

Historic Event: It was 1988 and Robert Levenson, a psychology professor at the University of California, Berkley, and his graduate student James Gross were attempting to find a tool that would reliably evoke sadness in people. This stimulus would need to be ethical and easy to implement in laboratories; the two began a hunt for the saddest movie clip they could find. More than 250 films and film clips were evaluated and tested on over 500 volunteers. Eventually the movie clip was found. It belongs to the 1979 film *The Champ*, a story of a washed-up boxer trying to make a comeback in the ring. The climax of the film depicts the boxer dying in front of his young son (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FAhrqKqK_CA).

Are you a crier in movies? Which films do you consider tear-jerkers?

In your Christian walk, what is bringing you sorrow?

In your Christian walk, what is bringing you joy?

Lesson Conclusion: Paul could not be more excited for a restored relationship with this church; his and Titus' love for the Corinthians permeates the entire chapter. Even though they had put Paul through one of the worst experiences of his life, he welcomes them with joyful, open arms after they repent. He applauds their godly sorrow and champions the obvious changes in their attitude and behavior. Above it all, he considers the good news about their repentance as a comfort from God Himself. In the end, Paul knows that God is the One who will draw near to the downcast, vindicate His appointed representatives, and ignite needed repentance and change in the church. Upon seeing all of this come to fruition, Paul rejoices exceedingly. May these things be so of us in our local community of faith. May we, too, lean on God for our comfort, be this excited and diligent to restore broken relationships, and practice true, transformative repentance.

Challenge

Identify any false repentance in your life. True repentance leads to life-change. Experiencing sorrow regarding sin is a great start, but it does not guarantee that the sorrow is of the right kind. The right kind of sorrow—godly sorrow—moves past sorrow and into transformation. Identify an area of sin in your life you have recently “repented” of. Were you simply sad that the sin was exposed? Were you merely upset about the consequences of the sin? Were you more undone by losing status in the eyes of others, or grieving God? Or, did you see your sin as a true affront against God Himself and change your life in response? Worldly grief is simply embarrassment without change. Godly grief is internal sorrow with external transformation. Is transformation lacking in your life? List the specific sin-struggles you have shown *sorrow* over, but have shown no signs of *change* in your daily life. Make a clear plan for change and share it with someone you trust so that you can be held accountable.

Reconcile with your “Corinthian.” For Paul, mended relationships mattered more than comfortable circumstances. Who are those “Corinthians” in your life that you need to mend friendship with? Whom are you withholding relationship from because you value comfort more? Identify those whom you need to reconcile with, and reach out to them this week, showing them that you value reconciliation over comfort.

Choose for yourself a “Titus.” Paul clearly shows how united and loyal he is to Titus in this chapter. With both the Corinthians burdening him with anxiety and the troubles in Macedonia, Titus is the one breath of fresh air for Paul. He is his trusty partner, his fellow-laborer, willing to make the tiring journey to and from Corinth on behalf of Paul. In the midst of incredibly difficult circumstances, Paul rejoiced in his friendship with Titus. Not even Paul could get through difficult ministry experiences without a person like Titus. If you do not have a partner in the Gospel, look around at those God has put in your life, and choose one for yourself today.