

THE MINISTRY: ITS END — A TRANSFORMING REVIVAL

2 CORINTHIANS 07:02–16

Introduction

This is the passage that covers the great revival that took place in Corinth. All the hurt that Paul had suffered from the Corinthians and all the hours of prayer that he had offered up in their behalf bore fruit — great fruit. The church repented. And God sent His Spirit of revival upon them. This is a great passage on the factors involved in revival. It is a great passage on the end toward which the ministry aims: the end of a transforming revival.

- I. The revival had a solid foundation: a faithful minister (vv. 2-6).
- II. The revival was stirred by godly sorrow and repentance (vv. 7-12).
- III. The revival brought a renewed spirit to a young disciple (vv. 13-15).
- IV. Conclusion: the minister held great confidence in the church since its revival (v. 16).

I. 2 Corinthians 07:02–06 *Revival: Minister's Faithfulness*

The revival had a solid foundation — a faithful minister. Faithfulness is an absolute essential if there is to be revival in the church. No church has ever experienced more problems than the Corinthian church.

=> The Corinthian church was filled with division (1 Cor. 3:3); pride (1 Cor. 3:18; 4:18; 8:1; 14:37); immorality (1 Cor. 5:1); fraud (1 Cor. 6:8); questionable practices (1 Cor. 8:1f); abusing the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17f); abusing spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14); and denying the bodily resurrection of believers (1 Cor. 15:12f).

=> The Corinthian church had some members who were levelling every charge imaginable against Paul, ranging from being a poor speaker and damaging the church's image over to stealing from the offerings and living an immoral life (see *Paul, Accusations Against*, 2 Cor. 1:12-22).

If there has ever been a church where revival seemed impossible, it was probably Corinth. Yet, revival came in the force of God's Spirit. One of the primary reasons was the faithfulness of its minister, Paul the apostle. These four verses cover his faithfulness.

1. There was Paul's (the minister's) great desire to be received by the church and be reconciled with those who opposed him. Note how he wrote about securing reconciliation.
 - a. He tenderly and warmly appealed to the opposition: receive us. He let them know that he wanted reconciliation; he wanted to be received by them.
 - b. He declared that he was innocent of the charges levelled against him.

=> He had wronged no man: treated no man unjustly.

=> He had corrupted no man; he had not destroyed any person either morally or

doctrinally. He had lived a moral life, always guarding himself; and he had preached and taught only the Word of God, not the ideas of other men nor of his own mind.

=> He had defrauded no man; he had not taken advantage of anyone financially or morally. He had not stolen or confiscated money from the offerings nor taken advantage of families or friends who helped and supported his ministry.

Mat 23:25 *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”*

Luke 3:13 *“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.*

Rom 12:17 *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*

Rom 13:8 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law.*

2. There was Paul’s (the minister’s) great love for the church. Note how softly and tenderly Paul spoke to the church and to those who opposed him.

=> “I do not say this to condemn you”: that is, I do not mean to accuse or down you while defending myself.

=> “You have such a place in our hearts:” I love you — love you so much I would die with you and for you, even as I long to live with you.

The point to see is Paul’s great love for his people — a love that reaches out to people *despite the terrible wrong* they had been doing to him. Great love — love that forgives wrongdoing — is an absolute essential for revival.

John 15:13 *“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

Eph 6:24 *Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.*

1 Th 2:8 *We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

1 John 3:14 *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.*

1 John 3:16 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

2 John 1:5 *And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another.*

3. There was Paul’s (the minister’s) boldness in proclaiming the truth. Glance at the awful corruptions of the church listed above in this note and imagine the terrible accusations against Paul. Then take a moment and think through how boldly Paul has written in I and II Corinthians. His boldness is clearly seen! The faithful minister of

God must always confront error and corruption with a clear and bold proclamation of God's Word. This is without question one of the essential requirements for revival.

Mat 10:27 *“What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.”*

Acts 5:20 *“Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life.”*

1 Cor 9:16 *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

1 Tim 4:11 *Command and teach these things.*

2 Tim 2:25 *Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.*

2 Tim 4:2 *Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction.*

4. There was Paul's (the minister's) confidence that the people would respond. The word “pride” means *boasting*. In the present passage the church has already repented and experienced revival, and Paul was actually experiencing the joy and rejoicing of the church's repentance. He was boasting in them, for *his confidence in them had proven to be well-founded*.

The point is this: Paul had always hoped. He never lacked confidence in the Corinthian church — that they would repent and be reconciled to God and to him, their minister. It was his confidence in them that kept him going after them. He knew they were not hopeless. If people are hopeless, then there is no need to continue trying to reach them. But no people are hopeless until God Himself determines they are and removes them from the earth.

Thought 1. Confidence, hope and belief in the church are essential if the minister is to stay after a people. Revival can come only as a minister perseveres after his people, *ever believing* that they will repent of their sins and turn to God.

1 Th 2:19-20 *For what is our hope, our joy or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.*

5. There was Paul's (the minister's) faithfulness despite great trouble both within and without. Very simply, Paul is saying that he, his body, never had rest from trouble.
=> He was harassed at every turn: in every conceivable way and place.
=> There were conflicts on the outside without from those who opposed him, from people both in and out of the church: criticism, censorship, ridicule, abuse, attacks and persecution.

=> There were fears within: concern for the church and fellow believers, for the Lord's mission and the gospel, for the lost and the needy.

Phil 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.

2 Cor 4:1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

2 Cor 4:16-17 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

1 Tim 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

2 Tim 3:10-12 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings — what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

1 Pet 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Pet 4:12-13 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be over-joyed when his glory is revealed.

6. There was Paul's (the minister's) great sufficiency: God and His comfort. When God's dear servants are under attack, God always meets the need of His servants. If a minister has ever needed God's presence and comfort, Paul did. Disliked, belittled, criticized, accused and slandered by others, and ever weighed down with a driving sense of duty and mission, Paul desperately needed God to sustain him as he worked with the Corinthians to correct the sin and errors within the church.

Remember: Paul had probably made a hurried visit to Corinth after writing I Corinthians. He had heard that many had not received his exhortation to correct matters and that things had deteriorated. Apparently when he arrived at the church he was rejected (2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2. See note, 2 Cor. 1:15-17 and Introduction, *Special Features*, pt. 3, I Corinthians.) Paul had left Corinth, and after regaining his composure he had sat down and written a severe letter calling for repentance. This severe letter was sent by Titus. It was the return of Titus from Corinth that is referred to in this verse. Paul is anxiously awaiting word to see if the church has listened and finally returned to the Lord and holiness.

The word was positive: the church had repented. Their repentance is discussed in the next few verses. The present point is this: God met Paul's need by returning Titus safely with the answer to Paul's prayers: the church had repented. Note how descriptively Paul gives all the credit to God:

"But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus" (v. 6).

Thought 1. God will always meet the need of His faithful servant. Sometimes it will be dramatic just as it was with Paul. Sometimes it will be in some natural and ordinary way. But note this: Paul had to endure heavy trials for a long time before God moved. Just like Christ, Paul had to learn obedience by the things which he suffered (Heb. 5:8). God meets the need of His servant, but He *grows* His servant while He meets that need.

Mat 28:19-20 *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

John 14:18 *"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."*

2 Cor 1:3-4 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.*

1 Pet 5:7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

1 Pet 5:10 *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

Isa 41:10 *So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

II. 2 Corinthians 07:07–12 Godly Sorrow and Worldly Sorrow; Repentance and Revival

The revival was stirred by godly sorrow and repentance. These verses give clear insight into what brings about revival within a corrupt and divided church, a church that is attacking its minister.

1. The church had an earnest desire to correct its evil. They longed, yearned and ached to be reconciled to their minister.
 - ⇒ They mourned: wept, wailed, lamented over the sin within their midst and over the mistreatment of their minister.
 - ⇒ They now had an "ardent concern," a zeal to correct the sin and to defend Paul, their dear minister.

2. The church experienced sorrow. Paul had proclaimed the truth: the church needed to cleanse itself of sin and of false teachers. It needed to stop the attacks upon its minister. It needed to repent and get back to ministering for Christ instead of living in sin and being embroiled in controversy. The church would not let Paul stand in the pulpit, so he had proclaimed the truth in a letter to them. The letter had done its work: the church, at least a majority of its members, had been stricken with a spirit of sorrow.

Note Paul's spirit: he regretted having to take such a stem approach as writing a stem letter. But he was glad he had declared the truth, for the letter had led to the church's conviction and sorrow.

3. The minister rejoiced, but note over what: Paul's rejoicing was not over the church being made to feel guilty and sorrowful, but over the fact of their repentance. He says that he would not damage or harm them in any way whatsoever.

Thought 1. What a crucial lesson for so many believers who find joy in the guilt and sorrow of those who had opposed them.

4. The church's experience of true sorrow: godly sorrow vs. worldly sorrow (see *Godly Sorrow vs. Worldly Sorrow*, 2 Cor. 7:10).
5. The church's evidence of godly sorrow. There are eight results of godly sorrow, of true repentance and revival mentioned in this verse, (v. 11)
 - a. Carefulness or *earnestness and eagerness* to correct the sin, pollution, dirt, wrong and hurt.
 - b. The cleansing of oneself: the church acknowledged its sin and repented. The church turned away from sin and turned back to God. It dealt with the leader of the opposition against Paul (v. 12) and apparently dealt with and corrected all the wrongs in its midst.
 - c. Indignation with sin: there was anger at the fact that the sin was ever allowed to seep into the church. In fact, there was a renewed anger at sin itself — a renewed commitment to combat sin with all the resources available in the power of God's Spirit.
 - d. Fear: (alarm) there was fear of the wrath of God and fear that great damage had been done to the church and to one of God's great servants, and to the name of Christ.
 - e. Longing: there was a longing desire to correct all the wrong done.
 - f. Zeal (concern): there was a zealous commitment to tackle the task immediately because so much wrong had been done. A strenuous and long effort was needed to overcome for Christ. There was also a zeal to lead all sinners to repentance.
 - g. Revenge: this means vengeance, punishment, the avenging of wrong. There was a renewed sense of justice, of punishing and correcting wrong-doers. This was necessary if some persons persisted in their sin and in attacking the minister, and in disturbing the fellowship of the church. There was a renewed commitment to allow no more open sin or underhanded divisiveness.

- h. Innocence: the church, by its godly sorrow and repentance, had cleared itself. Note the words “at every point.” What a glorious picture of true repentance and of God’s glorious grace. As corrupt and polluted as the church was, when they truly repented, God cleared them at *every point!*
6. The minister’s purpose for reaching out to the church became clear to all. This is a difficult verse to break down into clauses, even in the Greek. The point deals with Paul’s purpose for staying after the Corinthians. He straightened out the mess in their midst. Paul had not written and called them to repentance...
- for the sake of the wrong-doer,
 - nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong (himself),
 - but for the sake of the church as a whole: that the church might learn its true character. It is a genuine church; the church does care for its minister and for righteousness and for the Lord’s cause.

2 CORINTHIANS 07:10 GODLY SORROW VS. WORLDLY SORROW

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 2 Corinthians 07:10

Sin and irresponsibility cause regret and disappointment, guilt and remorse. In short, sin causes sorrow. But sorrow has no healing power by itself. Only repentance, a change of mind or a turn of life, can heal the heart of man (see note 7, and *Repentance*, Acts 17:29-30).

There are two kinds of sorrow.

1. Worldly sorrow. This sorrow can be a sorrow over doing wrong or of coming up short from what one expects. It is a violation of one’s values. It can also be a sorrow caused by being found out, or suffering consequences or being punished. In either case “the sorrow of the world works death” (2 Cor. 7:10). It works death in two ways:
 - => It eats a man up with guilt and remorse, depression and despair, defeat and inactivity (cp. Judas, Mt. 27:3-5).
 - => It embitters a man in rebellion and resentment against the consequences and punishment of sin (cp. Esau, Heb. 12:16-17).
2. Godly sorrow. This is the sorrow that is wrought in the heart of the believer by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. When the believer does wrong or falls short, the Holy Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:30). His work is quenched (1 Th. 5:19). His ministry of making the believer like Jesus is hindered and hampered. So He begins His convicting work. Under the weight of conviction the believer’s heart

is thereby led to repent. The believer changes his mind and turns his behaviour around to what it should be (cp. Peter, Mt. 26:75). Godly sorrow always leads to repentance. A believer who refuses to repent wallows around and eventually dwells in the realm of worldly sorrow. He always bears the mark of indwelling and unconfessed sin and failure.

Mat 5:4 *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

Acts 3:19 *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

2 Cor 7:10 *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

Joel 2:12 *‘Even now,’ declares the Lord, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’*

2 Chr 7:14 *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

Psa 34:18 *The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

Psa 51:17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

Isa 55:7 *Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

Isa 66:2 *Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?” declares the Lord. “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. □*

III. **2 Corinthians 07:13–15** *Revival and Disciple Titus*

The revival brought a renewed spirit to a young disciple. The points of the outline for the most part cover this discussion. Revival always stirs a renewed spirit within young disciples. This was certainly true of Titus.

1. The young disciple, Titus, had the wonderful privilege of being one of God’s instruments in bringing revival to the church. Being in the midst of a church-wide repentance (revival) had eased his concern for the church and given him a *refreshed and rested spirit*.

Note that Titus was so affected by the revival that his joy *greatly* affected Paul. The joy of the Corinthian revival not only stirred joy within Paul, but the excitement of Titus caused the joy of Paul to overflow.

2. The young disciple had been informed of the church's good qualities by Paul. Apparently, Titus had heard Paul boast in the qualities and strengths of the Corinthians many times. He had heard Paul share his expectation of God granting a revival of true repentance among the Corinthians. The young disciple had the privilege of witnessing the proof of a true church: the Corinthian church proved worthy of Paul's boasting.
3. The young disciple rejoiced greatly over the church's submissive obedience to the proclamation of God's Word. Titus, no doubt, not only delivered the letter written by Paul, but he also proclaimed the Word of God himself. Note how the church responded: with fear and trembling. They realized that they stood before a holy and righteous God who loved them, but they also realized that a loving God demanded repentance or else the facing of judgment. They feared lest they fail to do all that God's wonderful love demanded.

IV. 2 Corinthians 07:16 Conclusion

The minister held great confidence in the church since its revival and repentance. The church had experienced...

- a revival of unity: its problem of division was solved (1 Cor. 3:3).
- a revival of humility: its problem of pride was solved (1 Cor. 3:18; 4:18).
- a revival of morality: its problem of tolerating immorality in its midst was solved (1 Cor. 5:1).
- a revival of honesty: its problem of tolerating the wrongdoing and cheating within its midst was corrected (1 Cor. 6:8).
- a revival of love: its problem of allowing questionable social practices and stumbling blocks in its midst was corrected (1 Cor. 8: If).
- a revival of observing the Lord's Supper properly: its problem of allowing abuse of the Lord's Supper was corrected (1 Cor. 11:17f).
- a revival of exercising the spiritual gifts properly: its problem of allowing the abuse of the gifts was corrected (1 Cor. 12-14). ■