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A1346 – November 17, 2013 – 2 Corinthians 7:1-11
Comfort In Affliction

Q: In your teaching we are called to maintain our love in spite of others not treating us well but does this apply to believers only or unbelievers as well?

A: I assume you are speaking of my comments last week on 2 Cor 6:11-13 where Paul kept his heart open to the Corinthians and pleaded with them to reciprocate by opening their hearts to him. Clearly in this context it is Paul's love for fellow believers. Your question is whether this love should also extend to unbelievers. The full picture of the answer begins with God. God is love and expressed His love within His triunity before the world began (John 17:26). With respect to creation God first loved us and therefore we ought to love (Rom 5:5, 8; Eph 2:4; 2 Tim 1:13; 1 John 3:1, 16; 4:7, 12, 16; Jude 21). He demonstrated his love for us by sending His Son to die for our sins (John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 8:35, 39; Eph 3:19; 5:2; 6:23). Consequently, first, we are to love God (John 15:9; Heb 6:10; Rev 2:4), second, we are to love believers *especially* (1 Thess 3:12; Gal 6:10) and third, we are to love unbelievers (1 Thess 3:12; Gal 6:10). To love is to obey God's commandments (John 15:10; 1 John 5:3; 2 John 6). The majority of passages commanding us to love are in the context of reciprocal love for fellow believers and include putting up with one another (John 13:35; Rom 14:15; 2 Cor 2:4, 8; Gal 5:13; Eph 1:15; 4:2; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Tim 4:12; 6:11; Phil 5, 7, 9; 1 Pet 4:8; 2 Pet 1:7; 1 John 3:16, 17; 4:7, 12). A minority of passages command us to love unbelievers. Clearly we are to love them with the love of the truth in the gospel. The goal of bible teaching is that we would love from a pure heart (Eph 4:16; 1 Tim 1:5). Pure love is a fruit of the Spirit so it is not something we can produce independently of God (Rom 5:5; 15:30; 2 Cor 5:14; 6:6; Gal 5:22; 2 Tim 1:7; 2:22). As we actively depend upon Him His love is shed abroad in our hearts. Spiritual gifts are to be exercised in love or they are worthless (1 Cor 13:1ff; 14:1; 16:14). Our lives are also to serve as an example and stimulus to love (2

Cor 8:7; 2 Tim 3:10; Heb 10:24). So, yes, you are to love both believers and unbelievers but there is a difference; there is a special love we are to express toward fellow believers.

Q: To what extent do we protect ourselves and yet maintain love for unbelievers?

A: I am not sure what the questioner means by “protect” ourselves. I assume you are referring to the same comments from last week where I mentioned that Paul opened himself up, even allowing himself to be trampled by the Corinthians. Again, these comments were directed toward fellow believers. However, if you ask about our love for unbelievers we are to love unbelievers in the sense that God loves them, that is, He loved them such that He gave them His Son to die for their sin (1 John 4:9, 10; also cf 2:2). We are to love them by keeping open the channel for them to receive the love of God through the gospel message. This is true in both the OT and the NT. In the OT Jonah was told to go and preach the gospel to the Ninevites. God told him to do this because He is a God of love. Jonah knew the love of God but did not have this love in him and so did not want to go. He was even angry when they received the love of God and believed. So we must love the world in the sense of giving them the truth and praying that they will receive it. In our love for unbelievers we can never compromise the truth. We must always speak the truth to them in love (Eph 4:15). Those who reject the love of the truth will perish (2 Thess 2:10). We are not to love the world or the things in the world such as pagan teachings, principles and behavior (1 John 2:15). There we must draw a line.

As an example of love for an unbeliever, the American Pastor Saeed Abedini who is in prison in Iran testifies that a fellow prisoner started to beat him and instead of fighting back he hugged him. The prisoner stopped befuddled because he had never seen such love. That is the love of God, that while were yet His enemies Christ died for us. Saeed became a living, breathing example of this kind of love for enemies.

Paul had a special love for the Corinthians (2 Cor 2:4). In 2 Cor 6:11-13 we are seeing this special love he had for them and no other church. It was a love due to his extensive interaction with them. He had poured his life into them more than any other church. I can attest to the growth of this kind of love the

longer I am with you. I look at your changed lives as my work and as my reward.

If you'd turn with me to 2 Cor 6:11 we'll finish up Paul's excursus on the ministry that he has been expounding on since 2:14 and we'll pick up where Paul left off in 2:13 with the God of comfort who comforts us in all our afflictions. The situation in 6:11 is that Paul had spoken unrestrainedly to the Corinthians out of his heart. In verse 12 the Corinthians were not restrained by Paul but by their own affections toward unbelieving Judaizers who asserted their authority and emphasized externals. Verse 13, he commands them, he strongly encourages them to reciprocate by opening their hearts wide to him. In verse 14 he commands them to not be bound together with unbelievers because believers and unbelievers do not share a united purpose, interests or goals in life. We are on two different tracks. To not be bound to them means to not establish a relationship with them that requires you to walk in step with one another. The principal interpretation here is that the Corinthians had bound themselves to the teaching of these unbelieving Judaizers and it was leading them astray from the truth and closing their affections toward Paul. The applications here are many and I encouraged you to think through some of the more obvious ones. The five rhetorical questions Paul asks demonstrate that you have nothing in common with the pursuits, interests or goals of unbelievers; they collide at every point. Righteousness and lawlessness are totally opposite as are light and darkness, Christ and Satan, believers and unbelievers, the temple of God and idols. The principal reason we should therefore not be bound to them is because we are the temple of the living God. Then, lifting OT language used of Israel, Paul makes application to the Church; God dwells among us and He is our God and we are His people. How then can we bind ourselves to unbelievers? Verse 17 is the application command. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate and do not touch what is unclean. We are to separate from the world. If we do the Lord says, "I will welcome you And I will be a father to you and you shall be sons and daughters to Me." These are expressions of close intimacy with God, fellowship with Him instead of the world.

Now in chapter 7, verse 1, Paul says, **Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.** The **therefore** shows this

is a logical conclusion to the promises just laid out before us. What promises? The promises at the end of verse 17, that “I will welcome you” and of verse 18, “I will be a father to you, you shall be sons and daughters to Me.” Therefore, having these great promises of intimacy and closeness and security with God Almighty we ought to **cleanse ourselves** or purify **ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit**. This is the negative, the removal of filth, in particular in the context, the filth that false teaching is and the filth that false teaching brings into our life in every area. Lies, deception, etc...defile both our outer man, the **flesh** and our inner man, the **spirit**. False teaching corrupts us in our total being. And yet it is not enough to simply put off or remove the filth of false teaching by dissociating ourselves from it. We must also **perfect holiness in the fear of God**. This is the positive, the putting on of purity. In the context it would be by means of true teaching that brings about holiness. The Greek word **perfect** means “to bring about.” So the bringing about of holiness in place of the filth. The bringing about of holiness through the true teaching of God’s word comes about as we live **in the fear of God**. The preposition **in** in this context with the dative means “under the influence of” **the fear of God**. This means that you should allow the fear of God to be the controlling influence in your life. Thus it means you should live as if you are always in His presence; to continually recognize that you are always open to His gaze (Heb 4:13). When you mentally recognize that He is watching you it helps you put off all defilement and put on holiness.

Verse 2 returns to his earlier plea in 6:11-13, **Make room for us in your hearts**. Paul had room for them but would they reciprocate and make room for him? This is what Paul wanted. He had done nothing to restrain their affections for him. He states bluntly, **we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one**. These are things every one of us ought to be able to say and especially the pastor. Presumably Paul had been charged with wronging them, corrupting them and taking advantage of them but he had done none of these things, in point of fact it was the false teachers who had done these things. Thus there was nothing he had done to restrain them from making room for him in their hearts. The only thing hindering them was their own affections for the false teachers.

In 7:3, lest they think that Paul is condemning them he says, **I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to**

die together and to live together. Paul's main point with verse 2 was not to condemn them but to clear himself of any false charges. He had told them **before that** they were **in his heart to die together and to live together** so he could not be issuing a judicial verdict against them. For them to be in his heart to die together and to live together is to say that his affection for them was unbounded. He gives himself to them as their pastor, whether they are grateful for him or not, he gives himself to them without reserve. Paul's life was intertwined with theirs; he would care for them for the rest of his life. Neither death nor the trials of life would alter his love for them. This is one of the finest expressions of the meaning of unconditional love.

7:4, **Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf.** It may sound strange to you that Paul would say he has great confidence in them but he is nonetheless confident that they will respond to his defense and make room for him. Yet even if they do not he will continue to love them. It may sound even stranger that Paul says great is his boasting on their behalf but nonetheless Paul did boast in the progress that had been made. This church had almost nothing positive to commend when he wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians, but at least by the writing of this letter there had been progress made (cf 3:18). Paul attributed the progress to God who gave him the ministry of the new covenant through which God imparted a new heart with new desires to please Him as well as the Spirit who fulfills those desires as we depend on Him. Even though it had been a rocky road ministering to the Corinthians there was much to boast about in terms of the progress that had been achieved so far.

I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction. In the Greek **filled** is a perfect passive, it means I am being filled with comfort. Since in 1:3 the Father is the God of all comfort then it is the Father who had been filling him **with comfort** in the Corinthian situation. Further, he says **I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.** Now that is one of the strangest sayings from the human view point. How can you be overflowing with joy in your afflictions? Most people are not overflowing with joy when they are afflicted but they are overflowing with depression. But if they knew the God of all comfort (2 Cor 1:3) then they would know that He comforts us in all our affliction (2 Cor 1:4). Thus Paul can say that he is overflowing with joy in all his affliction because God was comforting him.

Now in verses 5ff Paul is going to give three examples of how God comforted him in his afflictions. The first example is vv 5-6 where God comforted him by the coming of Titus. This, by the way, is the end of the excursus on ministry and he is now bringing us back to the story that we were developing in chapters 1-2 regarding Paul's difficulties, especially with the Corinthians so let's review the background. The Corinthians were a hard nut to crack, they were rebellious, carnal believers who frustrated Paul. But Paul loved them; Paul poured his whole life into them. He even says back in 2:4 that he loved them more than he loved any other church. And this was probably because he had poured so much of his life into them. He had founded the church, he had trained the church, he had written letters to the church, he had visited the church. But they had still not responded to him. In fact, the last time he went to Corinth to show them his affection one man in the church stood up and opposed Paul. In response to this Paul left, Paul just got up and went north into Macedonia. He was heartbroken that the church hadn't done anything to stop this man. If they really loved him why did they not do anything and thereby side with the man against Paul. So rather than return and try to make amends he wrote a letter. This letter is known as the severe letter because in it Paul said some things that he initially regretted, hard things, difficult things for the Corinthians to handle and he sent the letter by way of Titus, one of his toughest disciples. Titus was always the go to boy when the going got tough. In the meantime he went on to Ephesus to continue ministering there. But before he went back he planned to meet Titus in Troas after some agreed upon time so that he could get the report of how the Corinthians received his letter. Now when the time came to meet Titus in Troas he departed from Ephesus but when he got to Troas Titus wasn't there. So to pass the time he started to proclaim the gospel and he enjoyed an effective ministry. However, despite the effectiveness of the ministry he had no rest for his spirit. Not finding Titus, he wanted to know how the Corinthians were doing and so he knew what route Titus would take to reach him at Troas and so he took his leave and went on to Macedonia following that route and hoping to intercept him along the way. It's at that point that we come to 2 Cor 7:5. **For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.** The ministry was tough. It was tough mentally, not knowing how the Corinthians were doing and wanting to know. He could have brushed them off but he loved them with an unconditional love and it meant emotional and mental difficulty; it was also tough physically in Macedonia,

he was being persecuted physically. He was in affliction from inside and outside, that's what Paul means by the words **on every side**. That's what Paul means by the words **conflicts without, fears within**; he means he was facing mental turmoil and physical turmoil; inside and outside. Paul wasn't immune to the turmoils that come with the fallen human condition.

But, verse 6, God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus. Titus was on his way to Troas, he just hadn't gotten there yet, he had left Corinth and was in Macedonia and while Paul was facing mental and emotional difficulty who showed up but none other than **Titus**. And who gets credit for Titus showing up? God. God controls history and God had Titus come to Paul in Macedonia at the perfect time, the most important time, not the time Paul was clinically **depressed**. The Greek *tapeinos* does not mean and should not be translated **depressed**. The word means "one who is unable to cope" with the situation left to themselves. God sometime allows us to get in situations where we are under so much anguish that we can't handle it, we are going to go to pieces, but God in those times will comfort us; somehow, he will comfort us because 1:3 He is the God of all comfort. The expression here in verse 6 is *o parakalon*, it's practically a title of God, He is "the comforting One." And He is the one who **comforted Paul by the coming of Titus**. That's the first way God comforted him. He sent someone to him that he loved, someone that was close to him. Sometimes that's all it takes, you just need to see a person you love; you are facing some turmoil and look who comes in the door but this person and just seeing the person gives you comfort. That's the comfort of God. That didn't happen by chance, that happened by design.

But that's not the only way God comforted him. Verse 7, **and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you**, that is, Titus himself was encouraged by the Corinthians. They had had a change of heart and Titus was greatly encouraged by this because he knew of their situation from Paul and that spiritually there were great problems at Corinth. But there had been a change and it was this change that encouraged Titus and Paul by way of Titus. That's the second way God comforted Paul.

But that's not all. Middle of verse 7, **as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more**. The Corinthians now had a positive attitude for Paul. Even more than that, they

longed for Paul to return, they mourned over how they had treated Paul and they were zealous for Paul. This caused Paul to rejoice even in the midst of the afflictions in Macedonia! So by three things, the last of which he is now going to elaborate on, God has comforted Paul; by the coming of Titus, by Titus' encouragement by the Corinthians and by the reported change of attitude they had toward Paul.

Verse 8 explains, **For though I caused you sorrow by my letter.** What letter? Not 1 Corinthians. There was another letter written after 1 Corinthians but before 2 Corinthians. Paul had gone to Corinth to show them his love after 1 Corinthians and he was offended and so he left and wrote a letter known by scholars as the severe letter. It's that letter that caused them **sorrow**. They were distressed by the letter. We don't have the letter so we don't know exactly what it said, but we do know the nature of the letter from what Paul reports here and earlier in chapter 2. The letter was severe, it caused sorrow and Paul says here, **I do not regret it**, that is, I'm not sorry I wrote the letter. **Though** he mentions, **I did regret it**, meaning when he wrote it he had second thoughts about it. There had been a time when after sending it he may even have wanted to retrieve it but it was too late. He may have written the letter out of hot anger at the time and regretted it after he sent it. But now, seeing that it had brought about good results he says, **I do not regret it**. Then he explains in the middle of verse 8, **for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while**—it caused temporary distress and Paul did not regret it that it brought that temporary distress. Why? Because it was instrumental in their repentance, that's where all this is headed in verse 9, believers' repentance, they had a change of mind with respect to Paul.

Verse 9, **I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance.** From this you can see that they could have had sorrow alone, that is, sorrow that did not lead to **repentance**. That would not have given Paul reason to **rejoice**. What gave Paul reason to rejoice is that they had sorrows that lead to **repentance**. Repentance was the chief aim of the letter. What is repentance? **Repentance** is *metanoia* and it means "a change of mind." It doesn't mean feeling sorry for your sin or promising to turn from your sin or anything like that, it just means you have a deep seated change of mind about someone or something. In the context they had a change of mind about Paul. Before they had been

antagonistic to Paul but from verse 7 you can see that they had a change of mind, now they longed for him to return, mourned over their treatment of him and had a zeal for his teachings. So their sorrow had reached its intended aim, and that is repentance concerning Paul.

Now this type of sorrow Paul refers to in the middle of verse 9 as **according to the will of God** or simply **according to God**. That is, it was God's intention that the sorrow inducing letter would bring about repentance. This is one of those instances where you see Rom 8:28 at work. You know the famous verse, "God works all things together for good." Here it is, here's a very severe letter, so severe Paul had second thoughts about sending it and yet God used it to bring about a sorrow that resulted in repentance, something good. God works all things together for good. We don't always see it in this life, sometimes we do, but in the end we'll see that He was working all things together for good. Be careful to not read into the verse what the verse doesn't say. The verse does not say all things are good. All things are not good. What the verse says is that God is able to work in and through all things to bring about something good, in this case repentance. And the purpose at the end of verse 9? **So that you might not suffer loss in anything through us**. By this Paul means rewards. If they had remained antagonistic to Paul it would have caused loss of rewards in the end because they were rejecting Paul's teaching and Paul's teaching was good, so to reject Paul's teaching was bad, they would suffer loss plain and simple.

Verse 10, explanation, **For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death**. Here you clearly see there is a **sorrow of the world** and this is nothing more than feeling sorry for yourself, becoming bitter, angry and resentful. Oh waaa, poor me, somebody wrote me a mean letter and I'm going to have a big pity party over it. That's the sorrow of the world; it turns inward and becomes bitter, feels sorry for self and leaves no room for repentance. That's all the things of death, that is, being out of fellowship with God, walking in darkness. But **the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret**, that is, later on there's no **regret**. You felt sorrow because you had sinned and that sorrow when coupled with recognition of God's will for your life brings about repentance, a genuine change of mind, unto **salvation**, that is, a deliverance in the Christian life from the power of sin. As Constable says,

“The proper response, God’s will, results in a change of mind (repentance) that leads to deliverance from the bad situation (salvation in the temporal sense here) without later regret.” This is the intended aim of all sorrow, that we might sorrow according to the will of God and respond by repenting and enjoying victory over sin. Believer’s repentance is necessary to the believer’s salvation in the present life, salvation from what? From the power of sin in our lives, so that it will not reign in us and keep us captive to death but set us free unto enjoying our eternal life.

This had clearly taken place in many of the Corinthian’s lives, consequently they now enjoyed salvation anew. As verse 11 describes, **For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you; what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.** The matter being the man he described in chapter 2 and the man he is about to describe again in verse 12 who offended. The man had offended Paul and they had initially done nothing about it. However, upon receiving Paul’s letter and having godly sorrow that lead to repentance they carried out church discipline on the man with earnestness, showing seriousness of purpose, this vindicated them; they really did love Paul after all. They had shown indignation against evil and sought to do justice, they now had fear of God and not man, they now had longed to be holy, they now had a zeal for the truth, they had acted by avenging wrong. In every possible respect the Corinthians had demonstrated themselves to be innocent of the matter. They had put themselves in the right having been in the wrong. God had used Paul’s letter to accomplish all of this and now that Titus had come and reported of their well-being and of their longing for Paul, it was time to rejoice. God comforts us in all our afflictions, not only after them but even in the midst of them. To God be the glory!

Now all this said, backing up to verse 1-2 we see that there was still a group of Corinthians that were holding out against Paul, that were not claiming the promises of God and advancing in sanctification. They needed to make room for Paul in their hearts by casting off their affections for the unbelieving Judaizers. Paul had done nothing to restrain them, no wrong, no corruption, no taking advantage of. In this Paul was not condemning them but rather clearing himself of all possible accusations because he had said before that he

was in it with them to the end, neither death nor the trials of this life would alter his love for them. Paul had great confidence in them that they would come around. He boasted on their behalf seeing that they had made progress. He was filled with joy even in his affliction. His example was the affliction he faced in Macedonia, both inner and external turmoil. But God had comforted him by the coming of Titus, by the encouragement which Titus received by the Corinthians and by the positive response they had toward Paul. The letter may have caused temporary sorrow but it did bring about repentance leading to salvation evidenced by advances in sanctification. For this God is to be praised and thanked. He brings about changes in people's lives through the ministry and therefore we have confidence even in the afflictions of ministry that God is at work both to will and to do His good pleasure!!!

What can we learn? What concluding applications can we take away? First, we have the promises of God. Let us claim them and be cleansed from the defilement of sin. Second, make room for my teaching in your hearts. If you are holding back make room for me. Let the word of God have its refining effect in your life. Let the word of God change you. Third, God comforts us even in our afflictions. He sovereignly rules history and brings an encouraging person or an encouraging report. God is at work. Fourth, there is a difference between a sorrow of the world and the sorrow according to the will of God. The sorrow of the world leads to death, bitterness, anger, darkness, but the sorrow according to the will of God leads to repentance that brings salvation, a fresh victory over sin that brings about positive sanctification toward God resulting ultimately in rewards.

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