

**2 Corinthians 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. 6 But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; 7 and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.**

There is a very rich and important word here in our text this morning; it is used repeatedly here by Paul so we know it's a central concept in our text. He uses it both in its verbal and its noun forms, so therefore we can be assured that it points us to the heart of the passage. And the word that I am thinking which reflects the pulse and the vein of Paul's thought is the word, 'comfort.' Now the key to understanding that word 'comfort' in order to apprehend it for its meaning and application for us and to appreciate the rich spiritual depths of this term is to do the best we can to cancel out our understanding of 'comfort' according to its English usage. Because according to its English usage, we would generally hear that word 'comfort' and think of something like emotional relief. We would think of something like words or actions which help numb our pain temporarily. There is nothing wrong with that, it is just not what the Greek word means. And the best route, it seems to me to get at the meaning of this word 'comfort' is through Latin. Because the Latin word 'fortus' does a great job of bringing out the sense of the power of this Greek word and you see the Latin term 'fortus' means something like 'strengthened', it means to 'make brave.' In other words 'comfort' is a stiffening agent, it is something that fortifies, it is something that strengthens, it is something that supplies resolve. So you can see that on this way of understanding the word 'comfort' it's not like a sedative which numbs us temporarily from our pain and helps us cope, instead this word 'comfort' is rugged; it's active.

To receive comfort, biblically speaking, is to be fortified with unyielding resolve and determination. It's to be given strength, and courage, and braveness, and confidence, and boldness in pursuing the kingdom of God. If you stop and think about that a moment, this wonderful concept of the grace of Christian comfort, that it enables to persevere in the Christian life and fortifies our hearts and minds; just thinking about it for a moment tells us how important it is for us to know how to lay hold of this rich treasure. Who doesn't need to be fortified? Who doesn't need deeper resolve and commitment? Who doesn't need greater strength that they can endure? And I would argue that is precisely how the apostle Paul thought of it. That is precisely how it plays into our text here this morning because the apostle Paul's burden is to tell us here in these few verses that he has been comforted. You see our text tells us the story of Christian comfort and the key to bridging from our text to our contemporary situation is to understand how Paul came to this comfort. And so in order for us to see how Paul came to this comfort we're going to see that the bridge between his comfort and the situation was the change of life that occurred among the Corinthians. See the cause of comfort for Paul was news, but not just any kind of news. The cause of Paul's comfort was the news of Corinthian repentance. And so the indication of our passage is this, that observing true Christian repentance at work among the saints is a means to great Christian comfort.

What Paul would be saying to us as we would deal with the various details of our passage is that when we observe this kind of grace operative in the lives of the saints it refreshes our souls and it fortifies our minds and it gives strength to our hearts. And the reason why it does all of these things is because whenever we see the true grace of Christian repentance in action, we understand that it is not a human work, we understand that it is a work that has been precipitated and originated by God's grace. And so it tells us that God is at work. And when we see God at work, and when we see his working in the midst of his church, in the midst of sinful situations to bring great resolution through repentance it ministers comfort to believers. It causes us to be fortified, it causes us to endure in the Christian life. And so this morning we want to think about this comfort which Paul testifies to here.

And in order to get at the main message of our text this morning, which is that the apostle Paul has been comforted by God through the news of the Corinthians' repentance, we are going to think about the story that is told here, and there really is a story here. I realize we just have a few verses but as we piece it together with the entire context and the language the apostle Paul uses, we have a riveting story. And the beginning of that riveting story, that the apostle Paul has been ministered comfort through the true repentance of the Corinthians, is to see first of all that the apostle Paul has been in great distress. And in order to appreciate just how powerful and impactful the Lord's comfort was to Paul through him observing the repentance of the Corinthians we need to appreciate just how distressed he was. And that story of distress is communicated to us partially here in verse 5, for he says 'even when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest. But we were afflicted on every side, conflicts without and fears within.'

So the first part of the apostle Paul's distress and the story of his distress, is that he says he had no rest. He had no rest in his flesh. Now here the word flesh doesn't mean the same thing that it typically does in Paul, which is some sort of reference to sin with all of its stubbornness and consequences and corruption. Here, 'flesh' simply means his humanness; his creatureliness. When he says that his flesh had no rest, the apostle Paul is indicating just how human he is. He was distressed in body and soul. And the word there 'have' is perfect tense, so it suggests that the apostle Paul experienced this for a long period of time. It was an enduring condition that he went through here. He 'had' no relief; he 'had' no rest. He was in a perpetual state of weariness. And the weariness of course is on account of his being in Macedonia. And it's odd that Macedonia would lead to such stress because the the whole reason why Paul went to Macedonia from where he had been in Troas was because he wanted to lighten the load of his stress. You remember that he was been laboring in Troas when he said a great mighty door of ministry had been opened to him by the Lord and yet as he labored away he realized he could not concentrate on his labors. He was overwhelmed with distress and so he went to Macedonia to pursue Titus.

And so we have the general statement here of Paul's distress and then we get some more specifics as we work our way into our verse because he says, 'we were afflicted.' Now this is a word that is a general term, but it's also a key term in the book of Corinthians, particularly in

second Corinthians Paul uses it numerous times with various synonyms; it's a key term. And the word is very intense, it could be translated tribulation, or trouble, or suffering, or distress, or hardship. There are other synonyms that you can think of but almost all of them speak of a 'grinding.' There is deep agitation that he is experiencing; intense difficulty and suffering. And now he makes that just a little bit more specific as he says, 'conflicts without, fears within.' So we see the two-foldedness of his affliction. 'Conflict without, fears within.' And most likely the conflicts without is persecution for the sake of the gospel. We are aware of when Paul ministered in Macedonia at other times that he spoke of the great opposition there. When he writes the Thessalonians, for instance, he makes it clear that they received the gospel in much tribulation and distress. And later on as he speaks about how he wanted to come back to the Thessalonians he says that repeatedly his way was hindered by Satan. And the word there 'hindered' in 1 Thessalonians 2 it is as if he is traveling a road and Satan has come along and cut a steep, sharp crater on the road so that it is impassable. It speaks to opposition then: the Thessalonians were riddled with conflicts from without, persecutions. He was bounced out of Thessalonica for preaching the gospel. We also think of his experience in Ephesus and it was a rugged experience as well. All you have to do is read Acts 20 just to see how severe the conflicts were there. And we should be mindful that it is appropriate he wrote about in Ephesians 6 about the kingdom of God being a spiritual battlefield where those who serve in it will have to arm themselves with nothing less than the full panoply of the armour of God. So this region, wherever Paul was in it, it always caused him great heartache and distress because of external afflictions on account of preaching the gospel. Whether that was real physical assaults, there is no doubt about those, but there is also external opposition. He preached the gospel with boldness and people did not want to listen. It's not just that they did not want to listen it is that they were actively hostile to him on account of the preaching of the word. So he had conflicts without.

He had fears within. He had great fears within. He was racked with multiple fears we can say. He was fearful for Titus. And this was a calling to ministry. And he was responsible for him at some level because he was the one that sent Titus to Corinth. It was always dicey and risky to travel in those days. There could be robbers and assaults and all kinds of travel difficulties associated with moving throughout the regions and so Titus wasn't back yet, and Titus was supposed to have been there so his mind is overwhelmed with Titus' safety. The fact that Titus hasn't returned may also suggest that the Corinthian church is in rebellion, in complete revolt. Remember he sent Titus there with a letter, we'll come back to this more in a moment, but he sent Titus with a sharp letter of rebuke calling them to repentance, and the fact that Titus hasn't made it back yet suggests that they turned a deaf ear to what he said, the problem between them and him has only gotten worse.

But don't forget that other thing that Paul says distressed him which is the constant concern for the church. I find that an interesting distress that Paul speaks about because after he lists a long category of assaults and afflictions and the most painful things you can think of to endure, he says, beyond all of those things I have the daily weight of the churches upon my shoulders. Obviously, he was a man that deeply cared about the state and the health of the

church and was riddled with distress knowing that things were going so difficult. The fact is that at this point in Paul's ministry almost every mission field he had labored in was on the verge of collapse. Paul would not win any prizes, or ribbons, or medals today for being successful because almost every single church he planted was being engulfed with evil. They were being engulfed with false teachers; they were being engulfed with false doctrine. They were being swept up in internal conflict and strife. And the church of the Lord Jesus Christ looked like it was hanging by a thread. Everything looked like failure. That is distress.

And so he says there are afflictions without, there are hardships without, he says here, and there are fears within. And I just wanted to point this out to you because the language which the apostle uses is so emotive, it is so powerful, it is so vivid. You know sometimes we think I suppose of the apostles as some sort of super human people, who because of the grace of God given to them and the capacity they had to work miracles and the fact that they were instruments of communicating the word of God by inspiration, we might think that they are something akin to modern day super heroes. But here the apostle Paul uses language, and it is fairly consistent with his language throughout the letters, he uses language which is terribly vivid and emotive which speaks of the situation of this fallen world. He's no different in his life than you are in yours. 'Conflicts without, fears within.' And you see that is the beginning of the story of God ministering comfort to him. The apostle Paul was in a position where he desperately needed the refreshing grace of God. Remember we said what comfort is; comfort is that which fortifies and strengthens. It is not a dose of tranquilizer. It is not a sedative. It is not a pain pill. It is the grace of God that comes to you in the midst of your sorrows and sufferings, and anxieties and makes you strong and says you can do it! It fortifies. It says, 'You can endure. Face your trials with boldness.' And so in what greater moment in Paul's life could he need this grace of God to come minister to him and pour this comfort in than this moment when there are conflicts without and fears within and Titus hasn't returned and the whole church is coming apart at the seams. Paul's life is like yours sometimes. Where do you go to seek help? Well, Paul sought the Lord. He sought comfort.

And you know it was great comfort that he received because here the apostle Paul makes it very plain that right in the moment of that suffering and that affliction and that distress, God worked. It is very interesting to notice this in the original and I think our translation does a fairly good job here because you notice that verse 6 begins with 'But.' To help us grasp the force of that we probably could put that all in capital letters to give us the sense of jolt that is it designed to give us. But the sense of this 'but' is very important for us to lay hold on because here the apostle Paul has basically said, 'We went to Macedonia and our flesh had no rest, we are afflicted in every sense, conflicts without, fears within BUT God!' He stops talking about all of the things that are distressing him. He stops with his catalog and laundry list of sorrows and anxieties and distresses. It's as if in the midst of it, that's the way the language is communicated, in the midst of the apostle Paul feeling all of this anxiety and this distress, it's as if God just comes right in the midst of his situation and speaks to his soul and brings such comfort to him. He says, 'God comforted.' Notice here in verse 6 how Paul begins with this most general truth, 'but God who comforts the depressed, comforted us.' I think it is important that the

apostle Paul doesn't just say 'but God comforted us,' he does say that, that is the heart of the story here, but before he gets into that he speaks about a general truth, 'God comforts the distressed.' What he's done there is he's linked back to the first chapter. In fact, what he's done is linked back to chapter 1 verse 3. It's a marvelous statement that the apostle Paul makes there as he opens up this letter. He identifies himself as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ by the will of God and he addresses the letter to the church in Corinth, and he speaks grace to them and then the next thing he says is, 'blessed be God.' And then he goes on to tell us what is so blessed, what is to be glorified, and praised, and honored, and exalted about God. It is that he's the father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

Remember here I said Paul doesn't just say that God comforted him, Paul says that God is this kind of a God, first of all, he's the God of all comfort. Here in verse 4 chapter 1 he goes on to explain how God comforts, he says, 'who comforts us in all of our afflictions.' He comforts us in all of our afflictions. Now that is just a passing comment if you will, Paul doesn't amplify it there. He doesn't specify how that comfort comes, or what afflictions that comfort might come in the midst of. He simply makes the general statement that God is a God who comforts. But now we get application because here he tells us, not just generally that God is the God of all comfort who comforts the depressed, or you can say distressed, or the anxious, or the broken down, but he says how God comforted. And he says God comforted us by the coming of Titus. So means were used. That is what I want to try to get across here this morning. Means were used. It's not as if the apostle Paul is sensing this overwhelming distress, 'conflicts without, fears within, no rest in his flesh' and then all of a sudden it is as if God 'zapped' him somehow in his soul and he just felt energized all of a sudden, he felt comforted and fortified, and built up. No, God used means to comfort Paul and the means he says, first of all, is Titus. Obviously, it would have been very comforting for Paul to run into Titus in Macedonia. After all this is part of why he's so distressed, and we've already mentioned this before, the apostle Paul had spoken about his situation in 2:13 and then he drops the thought that he'd gone over to Macedonia and he had fears within, and he just leaves the thought for five chapters; he doesn't talk about that situation any more. And here it's as if he never even skipped a beat. He goes right back to it, how he's in Macedonia but then God's answering his prayer in sending Titus.

We might think of the backstory here for a moment to understand why this is all so important. We've already said it several times, but we need to reset the topic just minimally here for a moment. Paul is having problems with Corinth and one of the problems is a picky problem, it's a minor problem if you will. There is criticism of Paul because he changed his travel plans. It seems really lame and petty to us but it was something that was seized upon, no doubt by the agitators, and the Paul-haters, and the false teachers in Corinth but they said, 'You changed your travel plans and what that tells us is because you didn't come to us in exactly the manner in which you specified, that you are a vacillator, you speak with two tongues.' Now that is hurtful to a person who has ministered faithfully and has been truthful. So it really hurt Paul that they would accuse him of such a serious moral defect over such a tiny matter. And then there is another thing here that caused the rift, we learned about it in chapter 2 verse 1, he says, 'I don't want to come to you in sorrow again.' And that word 'sorrow' is a powerful word suggesting

there was a serious conflict, and he says 'again,' so that seems to suggest that the last time he had been there there was a very sharp confrontation with some, or all the Corinthians, or maybe even just one, we don't know, scholars look at the language and they don't seem to really be able to tell what precisely occurred but whatever occurred it was a real conflict. It caused sorrow. It caused division. They sinned against him, in fact it was so agitating to the apostle Paul that he decided that instead of coming back to Corinth he would write him a very sharp letter. 2 Corinthians 2 tells us about that letter, Paul says he was sharp. Our text tells us he caused them sorrow, if you look at verse 8, 'by letter', but Paul said 'I'm not going to go back again. I'm going to send you a letter and I'm going to see what happens. And if you shape up and if you repent and if you acknowledge what you've done that is wrong, I'll come back.' And so he sent that letter with Titus. That sharp letter, that sorrowful letter, that provocative letter. And yet Titus didn't come back. But all of a sudden, in the midst of all of his anxieties and his flesh having no rest, and the conflicts without and the fears within, here comes Titus. And this is the means that God used.

First of all he was happy to see Titus. There is no doubt that they were fellow partners in ministry and so he greeted Titus and was encouraged and comforted by Titus' return just as any of us would be by seeing one of our family members who has been gone for a long time and we finally see them again. And perhaps it is even more satisfying and more encouraging to us when we greet them again thinking we would never see them again. So there is no doubt obviously a great consolation for the apostle Paul in just seeing Titus. But that is not the heart of his comfort. The heart of his comfort Paul makes very clear in verse 7 when he says, 'not only.' He says, 'Yes, I was comforted.' We could say at the least one of the things that comforted Paul was Titus' coming, but he says 'not only' that and then he goes on to specify what specify what was the deeper grounds of comfort, he says, 'but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you as reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me so that I rejoiced even more.' Notice here that what comforts the apostle Paul by seeing Titus, is Titus' report about the Corinthians. How Titus says that he was comforted by seeing them. How Titus reported they received him with fear and trembling, you can find that later in your text. They received him in a way that is worthy of a minister. With reverence, respect, courtesy. But you see it is this report of Titus that is tucked in at the end of verse 7 that really tells us where the deeper grounds of Paul's consolation lie. And it is the report about three spiritual dispositions which reflect true repentance. Now, next Lord's Day we are going to examine the specifics of repentance in more depth but today I would have us focus on these three spiritual disposition which reflect true repentance. And you see this is where Paul gains his comfort because he sees that God has worked mightily in those Corinthians and he's changed them.

And here first of all he says that 'mourning' was at the top of the list. Titus comes back and he says 'notice their longing for you', first of all. Longing expresses a sincere desire. And a sincere desire of obviously that they wanted to see him, they wanted to be with him. And the reason they wanted to see the apostle Paul and be with the apostle Paul is because they want to set things straight. They know that they have sinned against him, they have caused the break

in the relationship and so they have a sincere longing to see him to make things right. That tells there is true conviction of sin. They're owning their sins.

Second of all, the second spiritual disposition that is noted here is 'mourning.' Remember I said that this letter the apostle of Paul says was a sorrowful letter, if you look at verse 8 it says, 'I caused you sorrow by my letter.' This is a key word in the rest of the text. We will talk about that next week. 'Caused them sorrow.' They're mourning. In verse 8, we see that word 'sorrow' used two times and in verse 9 three times. But you see the upshot of all of this is this letter was used by God under the convicting word of the Holy Spirit to make them sincerely sorrowful for their sins. This is a key characteristic of true repentance and we will have to expound on that more next time but you see the fact that they are mourning over their sins tells us there is change. They are not casual about their sins, they don't see them as something that is simply minor or has caused a trivial break in their relationship, they are mourning over their sins. They understood that and they wanted to communicate their sorrow of heart for their disrespect and their wrong treatment of Paul, so Calvin says, 'their tears were a token of respect. Being effected with his reproof they mourned over their sins.' And so we see here the second spiritual disposition. They mourned.

Thirdly, 'zeal.' Titus reported that they had zeal for Paul, and zeal was the evidence of good will. It tells us that whatever negative was in their minds about Paul is gone. It speaks to renewal that has happened, restoration of the relationship has happened. And so it seems like everything is on solid ground and it is that evidence, those tokens of true repentance, that is the means God used. That is my main point here, it is that evidence of true repentance that comes through Titus' report to Paul which is the means that Paul says God used to bring him this comfort.

Well, I want us to take a break there in our text this morning and we will just conclude a few notes of application. And it seems to me one point of application that we simply cannot miss here in our text is that God is working in his church to maintain it. God is working in church to maintain its purity, and its peace and its relationships. Long before this is a story about the apostle Paul in all of his distresses being comforted by the grace of God, this is a story about God! Ultimately, that is what this text is about. This text is not only or primarily Paul, this text is about God in Jesus Christ purifying and sanctifying, and working in his Church. It is a marvelous story of what God has done. Remember the plot line is a plot line of division. Sins have occurred and the church is ripping apart at the seams. And the apostle Paul is come to them and ministered to them, and preached the word of God to them and they have disrespected him. And their arrogance has sowed seeds of division in the church and Christ's body is being torn apart. The victory in the story is about what God did. He took the initiative to maintain peace. When you think about what God did, and there is many elements to it, we could name a few here.

First of all, the Lord moved Paul to send this letter of correction to the Corinthians. This is not what Paul came up with, this is what God prompted him to come up with. God moved

Paul. We don't know if it was an inspired letter or not, it is certainly not included in the canon, it doesn't matter to us but we can say God moved Paul to not write off the relationship to the Corinthians but to write the Corinthians.

Second of all, we can say the spirit of God was at work here. He took the sharp sorrowful letter from the apostle Paul to these haughty, proud, arrogant Corinthians and he worked conviction of sin in their heart. He gave them a sense of respect for God and his messenger and the authority of his word, and he worked and cultivated within them a sense of teachability and submissiveness. That is what God did. And it was God by his grace who poured out strength in their heart through the power of the Holy Spirit that they would not only hear the rebuke but that they would make the change. And so this is all about a testimony of God's work in Christ to secure peace in his church. And that is a great means of encouragement to the apostle Paul. It should be a great means of encouragement to us as well. It is not just that God was working to secure peace and unity and wholeness in his church in the apostolic era, this is what God does. This message is primarily about God. This is God's work. Taking the initiative to bless the church by granting it peace. Whenever there is division in the church the only way possible way out is a work of God.

Third, this passage teaches us hope for damaged relationships. And that hope for damaged relationships is true repentance. Remember the backdrop of the story of Paul's comfort is conflict and damaged relationships. Paul rebuked them with a sharp letter because of a severe confrontation that he had with them. In fact, the confrontation was so severe and so sharp and so unsettling, the apostle Paul says, 'I don't want to see your face anymore.' That is to be viscerally upset at somebody. When you can't even stand to look at them you know you are upset. Brokenness in their relationship. But what I am struck by is again the apostle Paul did not write them off, he wrote them. This is not the world's way of dealing with relationship problems. The world's way of dealing with relationship problems is to get rid of the relationship, to throw it aside, to assume it has become so complicated and so complex it cannot be dealt with anymore. That is how the world deals with sin and brokenness in relationship. But the apostle Paul doesn't deal with brokenness and relationships the way the world does, Paul did something very, very difficult but absolutely crucial and necessary to restore relationship. He confronted sin. And I know that that is a hard thing to do but that is the biblical way to deal with restoration in a relationship. It is to deal with sin. It is in fact the only to repair a relationship because the fact of the matter is every relationship that has been broken humans and even between man and God, every single one of those relationships is sin. Brokenness is a result of sinning. And so it is hard to do this, I know that. It is difficult because first of all we don't enjoy confrontation. If you show me somebody that likes confrontation and conflict I will show a sociopath. We don't like it. And we shouldn't. Who would like conflict? Who would like confrontation. We don't. And so the fact of the matter is what makes restoration in relationships so difficult is we tend to avoid it, that is once a relationship becomes problematic we avoid it and it is hard to engage in this kind of restoration because as the offended party we don't want to deal with people that have offended us. We prefer to go sit in the corner and wait for them to come to us. And it is hard to deal with because people who are caught up with sin are often



blind to their sin and they're wilful about their sin, and they are stuck in their sinful ways. It is hard.

So when I say that repentance, and true repentance is the only way to restore a relationship it is God's way, it is a biblical way, it is a way we would follow, and should follow and must follow I'm not saying that without appreciating the difficulty involved but yet the fact of the matter is this is the only hope for broken relationships. And so this morning, people of God, I call upon us to commit to restoring our broken relationships with true repentance and I start with us.

Let me just apply to the household of God, to fellow members and brothers and sisters here in this congregation. If you know you are at odds with somebody in this congregation, if you know you are at odds with fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord because you have been sinned against or because you have sinned against them there is no other way to restoring that relationship apart from confrontation and repentance. If you've been allowing your relationships that are broken to languish in disrepair and brokenness, you are called upon by Paul's model here to not write it off but writing to them, confronting them, dealing with it, calling for repentance, this is how you handle it. And repentance must be the cornerstone of it.

I also apply that to Christian households here this morning. I say this to husbands and wives and I say this to parents and children, and even the siblings, you must seek repair in the brokenness of your relationships through repentance. You know, we have a terrible habit even among Christians, of pulling out that giant rug with the big broom and sweeping sin under it. But never yet have I ever counselled with a single family that is experiencing brokenness that have found the way to peace and conflict resolution by sweeping sins under the rug. But I can tell you of meeting people in tears who have been spending twenty years sweeping sins under the rug assuming that they were caught up in some safe place and the fact of the matter is the sins are just sitting there simmering, they never go away. So you will never be able to sweep your sins under a rug and then put on a smile and continue on as if everything is situation-normal. The only way to heal your broken relationships, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters towards one another is repentance. Sins don't just go away and neither do the effects of sin just go away. Sin goes away and its effects go away through repentance. And so next time we'll have to talk at length about what real repentance looks like but today we can simply say that this is the model. There is hope for broken relationship in true repentance. The model of Paul's conflict with Corinth tells us that. He confronted sin and God in his grace restored it through repentance.

The final thing that I would say by way of application here this morning is that there is comfort for believers in true repentance. Remember that word 'comfort', a strengthening, a fortifying, a making bold and courageous to endure in the face of distress and complicated situations. It is not that which numbs, it is not a sedative, it is not a pill. It is not simple relief from emotional and psychological pain. Comfort is God's work of grace to the human soul. And here is the thing I find so interesting about comfort and how Paul says in this way comfort comes and the fact of the matter is the logical deduction from our text here this morning is that comfort

comes at least in this way, when you see another Christian repent. This is a very fascination point to me but there is no escaping that conclusion from our passage. The apostle Paul says that 'God comforted Paul by the coming of Titus. And it wasn't just seeing Titus, Paul makes it clear. He says Paul comforted him through Titus, specifically Titus' report of Corinthian repentance. And so the apostle Paul said he received divine comfort in his soul by seeing other Christians repent.

That is a very interesting point to me this morning. We receive true Christian comfort when we see the administration of God's grace at work in the lives of other Christians. So when Christians don't repent and they stubbornly and rebelliously persist in their sins they are not only harming their own soul and destroying their relationships, they're also stealing an opportunity for fellow believers to be consoled and comforted and built up. Because repentance is God's work. Repentance is the operation of divine grace in the soul that turns the stubborn and proud away from their sins.

So what we need to do, people of God, to experience divine comfort in our midst is to watch and observe, Paul says it so. We watch and see what God is doing, we watch and see the working of God in the midst of his people. Binding up sin, dealing with the brokenhearted, changing hostility in relationships, managing conflicts within the church by his grace. Paul says that display of divine grace comforts saints and so we watch. We watch with the eyes of faith and we rejoice and we give God the glory. And so this morning, if you're seeking comfort this morning, and I'm sure all of us need that in one way or another because of the difficulties of our own lives, Paul says to you there is comfort. There is a God who comforts, more importantly.

Thirdly, God comforts by means. Apply faith to those means and your soul will experience this 'fortus', this strengthening, this fortification.

Let us pray, 'Almighty father we do pray that you would cause us to have eyes to see the wonder of the working of your grace. We are grateful this morning to know how you work within your church to restore and repair brokenness. We confess that we are a sinful people, that without your grace sustaining and preserving and maintaining us we would be rent asunder by many divisions. But we gratefully acknowledge the work that you have done and that you will continue to do and we pray that you would right now in our midst. We ask Lord, that you would help us to hear the hope that flows from knowledge of brokenness in relationships can be restored by true repentance. And so Father we pray this morning that you would help us to be a repenting people knowing of the gracious effects that flow to us and to all of your people through it. And so give us a heart that is ready to receive your word. Give us a heart to acknowledge our own sin. Give us a willingness O Lord to be honest and sincere and transparent and to deal with one another with Christian love. That you would be glorified and your church built up. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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