

(2 Corinthians) ch.6:3-7:5

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of patience, purity, and separation between light and darkness in being a true servant of God, as seen in Paul's example in 2 Corinthians 6:3-7:5.

Duration: 44:36

Scripture: Matthew 5:45, 2 Corinthians 6:3-6, 2 Corinthians 6:16 - 7:1

Topics: "Servant Leadership", "Christian Integrity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the letter of Paul to the Corinthians as an autobiography of Paul's inner life. The speaker emphasizes the importance of genuine love and speaking the plain truth without compromise. The qualities of patience, endurance, and integrity are highlighted as essential for being a true servant of God. The speaker also emphasizes the need for purity, knowledge of God's word, and continued patience in order to prove oneself as a servant of God.

Transcript

Let's turn today to 2nd Corinthians and chapter 6 and verse 3. We were looking at these verses where Paul says that he didn't want to give cause for offence in anything in order that the ministry not be discredited. Paul was very careful not to give cause for any stumbling or any obstacle that would cause the ministry to be blamed in any way. And therefore he describes the type of servant of God he sought to be.

And we saw in verses 4 to 6 that he proved himself as a true servant of God by the patience and endurance that he manifested in the midst of afflictions, necessities, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, tumours, labours, watchings, fastings, etc. Notice as we considered in our last study that the first characteristic that he mentions of a true servant of God by which he proves himself to be a servant of God is patience. Impatience is rooted in the flesh of the seed of Adam.

And all of us are basically impatient. But to be a servant of God, one of the foremost requirements is patience. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he told him the same thing.

He said in 2nd Timothy 2.24 that the Lord's servant must never be quarrelsome. He must be kind to all, able to teach, and patient when he is wronged. A man who cannot be patient when he is treated wrongly is unfit to be a servant of God.

Later on in 2nd Corinthians chapter 12, when he describes the characteristics of a true apostle, he says in 2nd Corinthians 12.12 that the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all patience. James writes in James chapter 1 verses 1-5 that patience is what needs to be perfected in us. Let patience have its perfect work, he says in James 1.4. From all these verses we see that patience is the greatest characteristic of a true servant of God.

Patient endurance in the midst of trial, opposition, ridicule, backbiting, in the midst of stripes and imprisonment, in the midst of being lashed, in the midst of afflictions and anguish, and in the midst of difficulties. In all these situations, in hard work, in sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, as it says in the last part of verse 5, if a person can manifest the same patient, steadfast endurance in varying circumstances, he qualifies to be a representative of God, an ambassador for Christ, as we saw in chapter 5 verse 20. And so we see it is not a light thing to be a true servant of God.

It is not a matter of Bible knowledge or of going through a Bible college and getting a degree, which anyone can get easily, but rather it is a matter of partaking of the divine nature, of allowing the spirit of God to so strengthen us in the inner man that we can be patient and enduring in the midst of opposition, trial, physical hardship, financial hardship, and all types of difficulties. And not only that, he goes on to say in verse 6 that he continues to prove himself a servant of God in purity, in knowledge, in patience, purity of life, knowledge of God and of his word. And again he repeats patience.

Notice the repetition of that which we were just considering the importance of. In kindness, as we just saw in 2 Timothy 2, a man who does not know how to be kind to those who oppose him is unfit to be a servant of God. There is so much of unkindness manifested by Christian preachers, particularly towards those who oppose them in their doctrine or in their life.

But a true servant of God will always be kind, even to those who oppose him or disagree with him. And further, in the last part of verse 6, he says, in the Holy Spirit, no one can be a servant of God if he does not know the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and if he has not experienced that supernatural endowment from above with the gifts of the Spirit that that brings. And further, in genuine love.

Notice the necessity that Paul found to use the word genuine. Even in other passages he speaks about love being without hypocrisy, for example in Romans 12. Why did he have to say that, particularly in relation to love? Because he had seen, in the midst of even Christians in the first century, that there was a lot of love which was only on the surface.

A love that pretended to be interested in the good of the other. And therefore he needed to speak about a love which was without hypocrisy, a love which was genuine and sincere. He goes on to speak, in verse 7, by the word of truth, speaking the plain truth, without watering it down, without adulteration, without compromise, the whole truth of God, and in the power of God.

Again, a repetition of what we saw earlier in the Holy Spirit. There are certain things he emphasizes again and again, in patience and in the power of God by the Holy Spirit. By the weapons of righteousness, or as another translation puts it, our only defense, our only weapon is a life of integrity.

Think of that. That the only weapon with which we stand against all the opposition we face from men and demons and everything else is that we live before God's face with a clear conscience. Therefore no one can oppose us or do us harm if we live with integrity before God's face.

That is the weapon on the right hand and on the left. No other weapon. We do not fight back with the weapons that other people fight us with.

If someone abuses you and you abuse him in return, you are not a servant of God. For a servant of God has no weapon but weapons of righteousness, and abuse is not a weapon of righteousness. If someone is unkind to you in his speech and you are unkind in return, you are not a servant of God.

For a servant of God does not have unkind weapons in his armory. His weapons are weapons of righteousness, of kindness and love. He speaks the truth, but he speaks it in love and kindness and goodness.

By weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left hand is a very beautiful expression to show that he has no other weapon in any hand. No other weapon. His only weapon is righteousness.

And it's wonderful when our right hand and our left hand are filled with righteousness. But that's not all. He goes on to say in verse 8, through good report and evil report, that is by glory and dishonor.

When people say good things about him, he is a servant of God, unaffected by their praise. When people say evil things about him, he is still equally a servant of God, unaffected by their criticism. By glory from men, by dishonor from men, it makes absolutely no difference.

And it's a wonderful thing when we can come to the place where our life is not disturbed in any way by the praise or criticism of others. That praise does not puff us up and that criticism does not depress us. In the beginning as believers we are like that.

Praise puffs us up and criticism depresses us. Opposition depresses us and support encourages us. But when we come to the place that Paul came to, we are unmoved, steadfast, unmovable, irrespective of whether people praise or criticize us.

People may consider us as deceivers, he says in verse 8, but we are true before God's face, regarded as imposters and deceivers by men. But God knows we are true. Unknown to men, yet well-known to God.

And that's enough. Why do we need to be well-known to men? That's not at all important for a servant of God. The only thing important is to be well-known to God himself, that God knows our motives and how we live and why we live the way we live.

Unknown to men, but well-known to God. Dying, weak, at the point of death as it were constantly, and yet here I am alive. Dying and yet we live.

Punished, but not dead yet, not destroyed. Yes, we are disciplined by the Lord in the midst of all life situations because he wants to perfect us, but we haven't died yet. Sorrowful because of so many things in the world that dishonor Christ.

Not sorrowful because of our own problems. No, a servant of God has grief because other people are dishonoring God's name, not his own, and yet always rejoicing because God is on the throne. Poor financially, yet making many rich spiritually.

Having nothing in this world, and yet possessing all things of real value, which are the eternal things. Here is a passage from verses three to ten, which I would encourage every one of you to meditate on for spiritual profit if you want to understand what it really means to be a servant of God. Let's turn today to 2

Corinthians chapter 6. We have been considering that the letter of Paul to the Corinthians is a letter that is actually an autobiography of his life, but not his external life as most autobiographies describe, but rather something far more important of the inner life of the Apostle Paul.

And in that sense it's a most valuable letter because it describes to us the type of man that Paul was in his walk before God that made him the effective servant of God that he became on this earth for God's glory. And because the people in Corinth were a bit hesitant to accept Paul's apostleship, some were followers of Peter, and they were willing to accept some of the other apostles of the Lord Jesus, the eleven who were with Jesus. This necessitated Paul having to defend his apostleship, and as we look back over it now we find that it was a good thing that he did it because God used that in his sovereignty to reveal to us for our own benefit something about Paul's inner life and walk with God.

The type of thing that made him a true servant of God, an ambassador for Christ he calls himself in chapter 5 verse 20, a co-worker of God chapter 6 verse 1, and a servant of God chapter 6 verse 4. And in our last studies we were looking at verses 3 to 10 that describe the qualities that a true servant of God should have. And as you look through them you find that they are not the qualities unfortunately that are emphasized today for those who are seeking to serve the Lord. Unfortunately the emphasis today has shifted from the type of qualities mentioned here to a mere understanding and that to an intellectual understanding of God's word.

But any of us who seek to serve the Lord would gain much profit by meditating much on verses 3 to 10 here to see what it means to really be a servant of God. In verse 11 Paul says, Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians. Our heart is opened wide.

And there we see Paul saying, I have opened my heart to you. I have hidden nothing. I have held nothing back.

I have spoken frankly to you. There was no necessity for him to do this with other churches but with the church in Corinth which he himself had established he found a necessity to do this so that they would accept what he had written as God's word. And he goes on to say in verse 12, You are not restrained in us, but you are restrained in your own affections.

Or in other words, there is no want of love for you in my heart but there is a lack of love for us in your hearts. There is no narrowness in our hearts towards you but there is a narrowness in your own. And the wonderful thing we see here is that even though the Corinthians were not loving Paul as they should have that did not affect Paul's love for the Corinthians.

And that is always the mark of a spiritual man. That he does not love people just because they love him in return but rather because his heart has been flooded with the love of God. God loves people whether they love him in return or not.

And when a man partakes of God's own nature, the divine nature, he becomes like him. He is able to love people who are narrow in their own affections towards him. And it is only when we see someone being cold towards us giving us the cold shoulder as they say that we can know whether our love is a merely human sentimentality or truly divine love.

So we need to thank God for situations like that where people are cold towards us so that we can discover what dwells in our own hearts to see whether we really have that divine love which Jesus came to flood

our hearts with. And there we see the mark of a true servant of God. He spoke about that genuine love in verse 6 and he says you see it in my own life.

I have that love towards you and it is just the same to me whether you respond or not. I will still continue to love you. My heart is open towards you and I share openly with you.

I don't respond in the same cold way towards you just because you are cold towards me. Paul could have done that if he were like other human beings. He could have just ignored the Corinthians and not even bothered to write to them.

But he wouldn't behave like that for that would be human. He was going to be divine. Verse 13.

He says now in a like exchange I speak as to children open wide to us also. He says in other words I'm talking to you as if you were my own children. Let there be a fair exchange.

Open your hearts to us like we've opened our hearts towards you. It's not that Paul was wanting to be loved. There are a lot of people in the world who are just going around looking for somebody to love them and they feel terribly insecure if somebody doesn't love them.

Paul wasn't like that. It was for the Corinthians own benefit that he wanted their hearts to be opened up. He wasn't seeking his own.

He was seeking the good of the Corinthians. He knew that the Corinthians would be stunted and baby believers all their lives if their hearts did not open up in love. And knowing that he exhorted them to open up not because he selfishly desired their affection.

Think what it means dear friends to be a servant of God like that like Paul. It was not just that he had knowledge. He had a life a heart that was open a heart that was steadfast that was never going to be shaken by good report or evil report.

And here is our calling to follow in his footsteps. And he goes on to say to the Corinthians in verse 14 Do not be bound together unequally yoked together with unbelievers. That has many applications.

It certainly has application first of all to marriage. For the yoke spoken of here is a picture of two bullocks pulling a plow through a field. And there was an exhortation in the Old Testament through Moses in the book of Deuteronomy where the Lord said to his people that they were not to plow Deuteronomy 22.10 with an ox and a donkey together.

An ox and a donkey can't plow a straight furrow because they have different natures one can move steadfastly on the ox but the donkey can be stubborn and can be a drag on the ox. In the same way we could apply that to marriage that verse and this verse in 2 Corinthians 6.14 where Paul certainly must be having that verse in mind. It's not right for a believer to be married to an unbeliever.

For the unbeliever can be a drag on his life. It's completely wrong. There are believers who say well after we get married I'll bring her to Christ.

Well, if that were a method of evangelism God would have exhorted all his children to marry unbelievers so that they can bring more people to Christ. But you see that such an exhortation is not found in scripture and proves the stupidity of that argument. No, God can accomplish far more through you in bringing many more to Christ if your partner is also a believer.

And not just a believer but one who is as zealous and wholehearted as you are. Otherwise still she or he can be a drag on your life. It's important when a believer considers marriage that he marries someone of the same spiritual temperature as he or she himself, herself is.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers. That has application also to business alliances. If you start a business along with an unbeliever you'll find a little later that that unbeliever wants to cheat on taxes.

Then what do you do? If the unbeliever wants to give or take bribes what do you do then? You get into all types of compromising situations when you join hands with an unbeliever in any alliance. And therefore that's a word that has many applications in many situations. Don't get into these unsuitable inconsistent connections with unbelievers.

For what partnership has righteousness with unrighteousness? That's the fundamental reason. Forget about trying to win the other person to Christ. You're entering into a partnership with the person who is unrighteous.

What fellowship has light with darkness? Light and darkness were separated by God in Genesis chapter 1. And we must not mix together what God has separated. That's dangerous. What agreement has Christ got with the evil one, with Belial? A believer is a child of God and an unbeliever is a child of the devil.

What fellowship can Christ have with the devil? And make sure in marriage that your father-in-law is not the devil. What part has one who believes with an infidel? There must be no connection in marriage or business or any such thing with unbelievers. What agreement has the temple of God with idols? There is a great necessity to emphasize in our day of compromise that God was the first one who made a separation between light and darkness.

Let's follow his example and keep light and darkness separate. Let's turn today to 2nd Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 16. In our last study we were considering the necessity of not being unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

Because light has no fellowship with darkness. And we saw that it is important that we maintain the separation that God himself made at the beginning of creation as we see in Genesis 1 between light and darkness. We see here that the first person who brought a separation was not the devil, but God.

Many people think that all separation and all division is from the devil. But in Genesis 1 we read that the first person who brought a separation was God himself between light and darkness. And so we see that we need to follow in his footsteps.

In marriage keep that separation between light and darkness. In business relationships keep that separation between light and darkness. And also in the church it is very important that we don't build a church which is a mixture, a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers.

Unbelievers are certainly welcome to come and attend the meetings of the church by all means. How else will they be converted? But we are not to let them feel that they are a part of the church until they are truly born again. This is the sad thing we see in so many churches that call themselves Christian churches.

It is a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers. And the unbelievers, nominal Christians, not really born again consider themselves as much a part of the church as those who are born again. God's glory can never be manifested in that type of mingling and mixing of light and darkness.

There must be a complete separation here between those who are really born again and those who are not. For what fellowship it says has light with darkness? What verse 15 does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? And I hope we realize if we are believers that we have absolutely nothing in common with unbelievers when it comes to spiritual things. Not one single thing.

We are living in two different worlds spiritually. And we should not think that we are going to draw them to Christ by making them feel they are a part of the church. They need to see that they are outside even though they attend the meetings.

And how much worse it is when there are unbelievers who have leadership responsibilities or who are given various responsibilities in Christian churches. We can only say that such a Christian church is a part of Babylon the harlot. That's not true Christianity at all.

Here is a tremendous verse that warns us to keep light and darkness separate. The church is the temple of God verse 16. What agreement has the temple of God with idols? We realize that you can't have idols inside God's house.

Well, how can then we have fellowship with those who have not given up their spiritual inward idolatry and yield it to Christ as Lord? No, we need to stand against these things in the church. For we are the temple of the living God. Just as God said, I will dwell in them.

He is talking about the church now. He is not talking about the individual Christian. In 1 Corinthians 3 when he said that, know you not that you and your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

You are a temple of God, 1 Corinthians 3, 16. There he was talking about the individual Christian. But here he is speaking about the church, which is the temple of God.

We, all of us together. For God has said I will dwell in them. He dwells in us personally, it's true.

But he dwells in the midst of the church. And I will walk among them, 2 Corinthians 6, 16. And I will be their God and they shall be my people.

Since this is our calling as a church, how important it is that we preserve this purity. Putting these verses together right from verse 14 to 16 onwards, we find that God can dwell and walk in the midst of the church, of any church, only if that church is careful to maintain a separation between light and darkness, between believers and unbelievers. When it becomes a mixed multitude, God can no longer dwell in the midst of that group.

It's no longer a true church. When it is a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers, God can no longer walk in their midst or be their God, and he will not call them his people. And it's very dangerous for believers to live in such situations and in the midst of such groups.

Therefore, verse 17, come out from their midst. From the midst of whom? From the midst of those who mingle light and darkness. From the midst of those who mix believers and unbelievers.

Come out from their midst. That's a word from God. It says the Lord.

This is not the exhortation of Paul. It says in verse 17, the Lord is saying this. He says, come out from their midst and be separate.

And that's the calling for every true believer. To come out from any mixed group. And to stand out with the Lord.

With those who are wholeheartedly following him. And that's something that you need to see yourself in this passage of scripture. It's not enough that you see and understand it because I say so, but that you see it yourself.

For verse 17, it says, the Lord says, thus says the Lord. If there is a prophetic word, here it is. Thus said the Lord.

Come out from among them. And in the context, it means those who mingle believers with unbelievers and who mix light with darkness. And be separate.

And do not touch what is unclean. And I will welcome you. In other words, if we don't come out, God will not welcome us.

He's merciful. Of course, he makes the sun to rise on the righteous and the unrighteous. He makes the rain to fall on the good and the evil.

In that way, he's good. And as far as material blessing goes, God will continue to be good like he's good even to the unbelievers. But, if we want God to welcome us, to be really happy with us, then we need to come out from the midst of such mixed groups.

And I will be a father to you. There's a difference between knowing God as God and knowing him as a father. He says, I'll be a father to you.

Not just a God who dispenses a lot of material blessings with which you are blessed, but a father. And you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty. It's one thing to know him as Lord Almighty.

It's another thing to know him as a father. And it's wonderful that God gives us such a promise that if we come out and are separate, he will welcome us, he will be a father to us, and we can be his sons and daughters. And chapter 7, verse 1 is really a continuation of this passage.

Therefore means, in light of all that we have just heard of these wonderful promises that God gives us in chapter 6, verse 16 and 18. 16 to 18. Chapter 6, verse 16 to 18.

I will dwell in them. That's a promise of God. Verse 16.

I will walk among them. I'll be their God. They shall be my people.

And here are some commands. Come out from their midst and be separate and do not touch what is unclean. And here's a promise again.

I'll be a father to you. You shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty, having these promises. Chapter 7, verse 1. Therefore, since these promises are ours, what should we do? Well, the very first thing we need to do is to cleanse our own hearts.

It's no use coming out of one group and joining another if you don't cleanse your own heart. I mean, that's the height of stupidity. It's our own heart that needs to be cleaned.

There are a lot of people who go flitting from one group to another to another and never cleanse their own hearts. Begin with cleansing your own heart and then seek fellowship with those who are pure in heart. Beloved, let us first of all cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit.

Notice, it speaks here about two types of defilement. One is a defilement of flesh which we can say refers to those more manifest sins like jealousy, envy, adultery, lasciviousness, lust and many other things like that. Defilement of spirit would refer to those which are more inward, like attitudes, motives that are not for the glory of God, which are not so evident.

Let's cleanse ourselves from both. From that which is external and that which is internal. Perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Paul speaks about perfection. In Philippians 3 he speaks about pressing on to perfection. Here also in 2 Corinthians 7.1 he speaks about pressing on to perfection in holiness.

It's not enough that our sins are forgiven. He says let's perfect holiness and there's only one way to perfect holiness. It says here in the fear of God.

We consider that in an earlier study in chapter 5 verse 10 and 11 that the fear of God is manifested by our living in such a way that we recognize that we have to give an account to God for every single thing that we have said, done, thought, for every attitude towards every person, for every motive with which we did everything. We have to give an account for everything done in our body and one who lives in the acknowledgement of this fact all the time is one who lives in the fear of God. And he says here, this is the only way to perfect holiness.

There's just no other way. We have to begin with the fear of God like the book of Proverbs says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom or we can say the ABC of wisdom or the ABC of holiness is the fear of God. If you don't learn that you're never going to be holy.

The fear of God and in that fear of God we can cleanse ourselves first from all filthiness of flesh and spirit. Let's turn to 2nd Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 1 Therefore having these promises beloved and the promises we considered were the ones listed in chapter 6 verse 16 to 18 that God would be a father to us let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit. The only way to respond to God's promises is by cleansing ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit.

Many people think the only thing I have to do with God's promises is just claim them in the name of Jesus and do and take them and they will automatically be fulfilled. Almost every promise in God's word has got a condition. Even forgiveness of sins which is free has got the condition that you got to repent and believe and every other promise too.

And so it says here if you want the benefit of these promises make sure that light and darkness are separated in your own life. Make sure there's no idolatry in your own life if you want to be the temple of God for God cannot dwell in a temple filled with idols. Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit.

Notice the word all don't be satisfied with some or much cleansing but all. Perfecting holiness in the fear of God means aim at perfect holiness as one translation puts it. Aim at perfect holiness.

Have you become perfectly holy? No. None of us have. Well aim at it then.

The only person who need not aim at perfect holiness is the man who feels he's already perfectly holy. But any one of us who acknowledges that we have not yet become like Jesus we are not yet perfectly holy and all of us have to acknowledge that if we are honest. We have to aim at perfect holiness.

To aim at perfect holiness is the exhortation of the Holy Spirit in this day to every believer to every child of God. Aim at perfect holiness. He who has ears to hear let him hear.

Aim at perfect holiness in deepest reverence for God. Verse 2. Make room for us in your hearts Paul says because we have wronged no one. We corrupted no one.

We have taken advantage of no one. Think of the testimony of this magnificent servant of God. He says you know and he could speak about it boldly I have never wronged any man.

Every servant of God should be able to say that. I have never done something wrong to a man. If by accident he did he would immediately set it right and sort it out, make restitution, apologize humble himself so that he could live with a clear conscience before God and men.

We have wronged no one. We have corrupted no one. He says we haven't harmed anyone or ruined anyone by our life or testimony or caused anyone to stumble.

And we haven't cheated anyone. We haven't taken advantage of anyone. What a lot of taking advantage of other believers there is in the midst of those who call themselves God's servants.

Taking advantage of others financially, taking advantage of their hospitality, taking advantage of other believers in so many ways. Paul was one who was very careful even though he was an apostle, and a mighty apostle at that. Never to take advantage of other believers in any way.

He walked in humility as a true servant of Christ. Wronging no one, corrupting no one, taking advantage of no one. He says then why can't you listen to me? I'm not saying this to blame you.

Paul would never speak to blame anyone. I do not speak to condemn you. Another great quality in those who want to preach as God's servants.

If you can say about every message you give, I do not speak to condemn you. Then you qualify to speak as God's mouthpiece. It's one of the qualifications anyway.

That you do not speak to condemn people. You do not speak to blame people. You do not speak to find fault with people.

There is such a lot of speaking and preaching which is condemning people, finding fault with them and blaming them. Paul says I do not speak to condemn or find fault or blame. For he says I'm one with you.

I have you in my heart. I hold you so close in my heart that neither life nor death can separate us. Now remember that the Corinthians were not spiritual believers.

They were babies. There was a lot of carnality in their midst. But Paul did not hesitate to identify himself with his carnal children.

For they came to Christ through him. He did not ditch them just because they hadn't developed spiritually. He identified himself with them and he says carnal or baby, whatever it is, you're in our hearts.

And neither death nor life will separate us. Come death, come life, we'll face it together. Think of having such an attitude towards one's flock.

It's rare to find such shepherds. That's why Jesus said that the shepherds were few. He looked around and he saw people like sheep without a shepherd and he said the laborers are few.

That is the shepherds are few. For shepherds need to have a heart like this. Further Paul says in verse four, great is my confidence in you.

Great is my boasting on your behalf. Think of being able to say that to people who are not very spiritual. I have great confidence in you.

Paul had a great gift of encouraging discouraged depressed believers. And that's a gift that any true servant of God needs. To be able to speak in such a way as to encourage those who haven't yet come to victory over sin.

A spiritually mature Christian will never get discouraged or depressed. He has victory over that like Paul himself as we saw in chapter four and chapter five. But he has to deal with so many other believers who haven't come to that level of spiritual life yet.

Who are still immature, still struggling, still defeated, still depressed, still insecure. And Paul had that gift of encouraging them by good words. He says I have confidence in you.

I have great pride in you. Because they had responded to his correction in his first letter. They hadn't become perfect.

But a person who is willing to respond to correction is on the way to life. There's great hope for all those who are willing to receive correction. I'm filled with comfort he says.

I'm full of encouragement. In spite of all the troubles. We have conflicts without fears within he says in verse five.

But in the midst of it all I'm filled with encouragement in spite of all our troubles. My heart is overflowing with happiness. In the midst of all his affliction his consolation was found in the fact that the Corinthians had responded to the correction of his first letter.

Think how Paul's mind worked. His was no narrow mind occupied with his own interests and his own problems and feeling sorry for himself. He didn't live with that poor me syndrome operating in his life all the time.

He was so free from that. His joy came from seeing other believers progressing spiritually. And he had no time to think of his own afflictions.

He wasn't bothered about his own afflictions. He says we're greatly encouraged in the midst of all our affliction because of you. We're proud of you.

We're filled with encouragement and comfort and overflowing he says with joy in the midst of all our trials. Then he tells us something a little bit about these trials. He's very careful not to speak too much about the trials and that too is a mark of a true servant of God.

He doesn't make much of the trials he goes through in his own personal life. He does mention a little here in verse five that when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest but we were afflicted on every side. Conflicts without fears within.

And there we see something about Paul's honesty that when there were conflicts without there were fears within. He doesn't hide that. There were pressures within but he was strengthened in that.

He did not yield to those fears. He did not surrender and get depressed. And the way God helped him is seen here in verse six But God who comforts the depressed comforted us by the coming of Titus.

Here's a very wonderful title for God. God who comforts the depressed. Think of that.

Particularly those who are prone to discouragement and depression. Think of God as the one who comforts the depressed. Who lifts up and strengthens those who are discouraged and disheartened.

Comforted us. And the interesting thing we see here is that God's comfort did not come directly from heaven through some supernatural demonstration of his power. But it came through the coming of Titus he says.

And when Titus came he was comforted. And this is what we see here that Paul's encouragement came through fellowship with another like-minded brother. And there's something that we can take heed to particularly any of us who are tempted in this area to be discouraged and depressed.

The way to overcome is to seek fellowship with others of like mind. God seeks to lift us up and encourage us by giving us fellowship with other believers. Because thereby he teaches us the value of the body of Christ.

There is power where even two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus. There he is present in a way in which we cannot experience his presence when we are alone. For that is the meaning of where two or three are gathered together.

He is present in their midst. Isn't he in our hearts? Of course he is. But when two at least two come together in his name there is a manifestation of his presence and his power which goes beyond what we experience personally.

This is the solution to depression. To seek fellowship in the body of Christ with other believers.

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