

#11 Bible Study~06-22-21~2 Cor. 7.1-16

From 2 Cor. 2:14-7:5 is known by many commentators as the "Great Digression." In 2:12-13 Paul expressed his concern about not being able to find his brother (in ministry) Titus. Now in 7:5-6 he expresses joy at the comfort of being reunited with Titus. It is not uncommon for Paul to have digressions in his letters. This one is just longer than most.

7:1 & 7:2-4 are another example of improper chapter division. It would be a better division if 7:4 was the end of chapter 16. 7:1 is a continuation of the announcement about our being a temple of the Holy Spirit. Since we are a temple of God we should make every effort to live a holy life out of our respect (fear) of God. The word 'fear' here is used as Luther did in the explanation to the commandments: "We should fear and love God." It is to recognize the greatness of God and honor him as such.

7:2-4 returns to 6:11-13 which concluded with a call for the Corinthians to widen their hearts to make the proper room for Paul in their lives. He has a trilogy of defense. We have not wronged, corrupted, or taken advantage of anyone. Then he has a trilogy of defense of his feelings for them: he has pride, comfort, and joy because of his feelings.

Some have believed that 7:5-12 is part of the missing Corinthian letter since Paul talked about "grieving them." He said he was sorry to grieve them, but it was good because they were grieved into repentance. I believe Paul gives us an important lesson on repentance. Repentance is not just feeling sorry for what we have done. Shame can do that. Godly repentance is to be sorry that we have rebelled against God and caused him pain.

I'm sure most of you can remember a time in your life where you know your sin caused pain in the hearts and minds of your earthly parents. The same thing happens in the heart of God. Godly repentance always has God in mind and not just our own shame and disgust with ourselves. I always think of how Joseph resisted the temptation of Potiphar's wife which showed he understood the true nature of sin. His final word of rejection of her advances is found in Genesis 39:9, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

I believe v. 12 shows Paul is not thinking about the tragic sexual sin of a son who has his father's wife. He said he did not write for the sake of the one who did wrong or for the sake of the one who suffered wrong but that the congregation itself should be led into self-examination. I believe this harkens back to his remarks in 2 Cor. 2:5-11. It was time to turn from punishment of the sinner to forgiveness and comfort.

Now he returns to his beloved Titus, perhaps a convert of Paul since he calls him, "my true child in a common faith." As Titus's spiritual father he finds double pride in his work among the Corinthians. Even though Paul had a rocky time with them, they accepted Timothy and worked in harmony with him. He was thrilled that Titus held them in high esteem because he remembered their obedience. Now Paul is confident of things going well in Corinth.

I can tell you from my personal experience that when a pastor moves on from a congregation, he is always glad to hear reports of the congregation as they labor faithfully with a new pastor. I fully understand why Paul would say, "I rejoice" when he gets the update from Titus.

Next: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.