2 Corinthians 7:5–16 (2)

5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within.
6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,
7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.
8 For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while.
9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.
10 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.
11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.
12 So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.
13 Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.
14 For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true.
15 And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.
16 I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.

1. Background of Today's Passage

We looked at this passage the last time we shared the Lord's Supper, and today we revisit it. What is the background of this text?

When the Apostle Paul arrived in Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door for evangelism had been opened. However, he could not find Titus there. So, despite the opportunity, he left Troas and went to Macedonia. Who was Titus? Titus was a Greek who had been saved through Paul's gospel ministry. He was a trusted coworker who had traveled with Paul and served alongside him. Paul loved him dearly, even calling him his "true son."

Paul entrusted Titus with a very important mission—delivering a letter to the Corinthians, who had rejected Paul and strayed into sin. But Titus's task wasn't merely to deliver a letter. He was to confront the Corinthians' sins on Paul's behalf, urge them to repent, and help reconcile them both with Paul and with God.

However, when Titus did not return quickly from Corinth, Paul left Troas and went to Macedonia—despite knowing greater tribulation awaited him there—anxiously longing for news from Titus. His anxiety stemmed from two concerns: first, his deep worry for his beloved son Titus, and second, his even deeper concern for the Corinthian church.

Eventually, Paul met Titus and received news about the Corinthians' response to his letter. That news brought him overwhelming joy and comfort.

2 Corinthians 7:6–7: *"But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more."*

Titus not only returned safely—he brought good news. He reported that the Corinthians received him with fear and trembling and, through Paul's letter, repented and turned back. They not only returned to the true gospel but were also reconciled with Paul, and thus with God.

Paul experienced a profound joy and comfort. Though his rebuke had saddened them temporarily, they ultimately repented. This was the work of God. And so Paul gave all praise, thanks, and glory to Him.

In 2 Corinthians 7:4–16, the depth of Paul's joy and comfort is evident: the word "comfort" appears seven times, and "joy" appears six. Paul's heart was clearly with the Corinthian church.

Where did this overflowing comfort and joy come from?

2 Corinthians 7:4–5: *"I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy. For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within."*

Paul's comfort and joy came *in the midst of* tribulation. In Macedonia, where he had gone hoping to find Titus, he found even more suffering—his body found no rest, and he was beset on all sides. Yet his joy and comfort did not come because the suffering ended. Rather, his joy *grew* in the midst of his suffering. In fact, the suffering only magnified the comfort and joy he received.

Why? Because his suffering was for the spiritual benefit of the church. His ministry was one of gospel-driven suffering—for the church and for the saints. It was a participation in the sufferings of Christ.

What was the purpose of Christ's suffering? It was for the gospel. To save His beloved people. His love for the church led Him to the suffering of death.

What was the purpose of Paul's suffering? The same. Out of love for the church and saints, Paul endured suffering—even to the point of death. This suffering was like the pain of childbirth for the church, born out of deep love for those in Christ.

And so, when Paul heard of the Corinthians' repentance and transformation, his suffering melted away. It was worth it. The joy and comfort strengthened him to endure further. It moved him to praise the power of Christ's gospel and the grace of God.

Who were these Corinthians that Paul loved so deeply? What was the nature of their relationship?

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2. The Apostle Paul's Suffering and the Pain of Childbirth

To Paul, the Corinthian believers were like spiritual children, born through the pain of his gospel ministry. He had founded the church with tears and prayers, facing great opposition, hatred, and persecution.

As seen in chapter 6, Paul endured much to give birth to these spiritual children: hardship, poverty, beatings, imprisonment, sleeplessness, and hunger. But every time new believers were born—confessing

faith, receiving baptism, forming a church—he experienced unspeakable joy and comfort. Why? Because his labor was not in vain in the Lord.

Now, the Corinthians were part of the body of Christ, one family with Paul—never to be separated.

Paul's calling didn't end with their conversion. He was also called to nurture them—to build them up, help them grow. This too brought suffering. Like childbirth, it's not just about birth, but also growth.

Galatians 4:19: *"My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!"*

Because he loved them like a father, Paul endured labor pains for their spiritual growth. But now, the Corinthians were sick in spirit. They had hardened their hearts, fallen into sin, abandoned the gospel, and even turned against Paul. So even though God had opened a new door for gospel ministry, Paul set aside the opportunity to first care for those whose faith was faltering.

His heart was entirely with the Corinthian church. External persecution could not compare to the inward anguish he felt for them.

2 Corinthians 11:23–28: *"…with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death… And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."*

Beyond physical suffering, Paul experienced a daily burden—his deep concern for the church, especially when sin and falsehood threatened it. He wrote a sorrowful, tearful letter to confront their sin and sent it with Titus, filled with love and hope.

Afterward, he could not simply wait passively. He went to Macedonia, despite greater tribulation, longing to hear how they had responded. His love made him willing to suffer more.

When he finally heard that the Corinthians had repented and borne fruit, Paul experienced overwhelming comfort and joy.

Some may wonder, "Did Paul lack faith? Shouldn't he have simply trusted Jesus and waited?" But no, Paul *did* trust God. Even if the Corinthians had rejected his letter, he would still have entrusted everything to God's sovereign grace. His actions were not from doubt but from *fellowship* with Christ. His suffering reflected the very heart of God.

This is what it means to believe the gospel: not just knowing truth, but sharing in the heart of Jesus—caring deeply for others, longing for their salvation, and laboring for their spiritual benefit. Through this love, the church grows and becomes more like Jesus.

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3. The Pain of Jesus' Labor

In Paul's suffering, we ultimately see Jesus Christ. Jesus is not a distant observer of our sin. He did not merely send messengers and wait for our repentance. Out of His earnest, burning love, the holy Son of God left His throne and came into this world.

He willingly entered into suffering, even death and judgment, for our sake. On the cross, He endured the ultimate pain of childbirth, bearing God's wrath and saving us from sin.

Why did He endure it? For the joy set before Him—our salvation, our repentance, our worship.

But Christ's labor doesn't stop at our salvation. Even now, He leads us through another kind of childbirth—the painful, patient process of growing us into His likeness. He sent the Holy Spirit to work in us, speak through the Word, and guide our steps. He longs for us, cares for us, and endures with us.

Think about the joy Jesus will experience when we arrive in heaven, fully transformed. There is no greater comfort or joy for Him than seeing the work completed.

And Jesus invites us to participate in His ministry. He gives us His heart and calls us to love others with it—to live not for ourselves but for the spiritual good of others. He makes it so that others grow and stand firm through our love and even our suffering.

Through the gospel, we come to understand and share in Christ's love, enduring pain for the sake of our brothers and sisters, that they too may grow into the image of Jesus. He could have done it all alone, but instead, He entrusted this task to His church. In doing so, He establishes His people and grows the body of Christ.

Conclusion

Dear saints, the gospel is not just head knowledge. It transforms our lives. It makes us resemble Jesus. It gives us His heart—for the church, for one another.

The gospel compels us to care deeply, to run toward one another, to endure hardship for one another's good. It leads us to share in the sufferings of Christ, to embrace one another, and to live for the benefit of our brothers and sisters.

Where our heart is, there lies our comfort and joy. When we see our loved ones become more like Jesus, when we see repentance, faith, and transformation—we taste a joy that cannot be described.

This is the fellowship of heaven. I pray that we would bear much fruit of the gospel in our lives.

Why do our Christian lives include suffering? Because we love. And this love is from Jesus. It drives us into His suffering—for the sake of others. When we love this way, others are sanctified. This is the fellowship of saints, through the Holy Spirit's grace.

Let us look to Jesus at the communion table today. He says to us, "You and I are one. I am in you, and you are in Me. I will never leave you. I will carry your burdens. I will complete the good work I began."

Even when we fail Him, He continues to labor with deep, patient love, leading us through the pains of transformation.

So let us come with repentance and gratitude. Let us eat and drink what He has given and share in the loving fellowship of His heart.

And let us remember—Jesus has entrusted His work to us. Until He returns, He calls us to love, serve, and bear one another's burdens. The greatest joy will be seeing Him face to face—and seeing our beloved brothers and sisters, whom we have longed for, standing radiant before Him.

May all of us at Theophilus OPC long for that joy, labor for it, and be built up together as one body in Christ.