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The Effects of the Severe Letter

7: 5-16

The effects of the severe letter DIG: Paul picks up the account of his travels which he left off in 2:12-13. How does his account in 7:5-7 illustrate why he began this letter with thanks to God for his comfort (1:3-7)? What was the result of Paul's previous letter to them? What intentions does Paul clarify here? What tone of voice do you hear in verse 16? In light of the previous severe letter, why did Paul emphasize his present joy and confidence?

REFLECT: Have you ever been confronted about a wrong by someone who loves you? How did you feel toward that person at the time? How are godly sorrow and worldly sorrow different? What determines which type of sorrow a person has? When is it more loving to confront someone with their sin than to ignore it? What attitudes are needed to keep loving confrontation from becoming judgmental? How do you see those attitudes in Paul?

Confrontation of sin leads to pain and sorrow, which leads to repentance, which leads to salvation.

There are few things in life more **painful** than broken relationships. This is especially true in ministry. Difficult relationship between the sheep and the shepherds. As he wrote **Second Corinthians**, **Paul** nursed a broken heart over the church **he** founded, **loved**, and served. The church in which **he** had invested nearly two years of **his** life had repaid **him** with disloyalty. They had allowed **false apostles** (**to see link click Af - The Problem of the False apostles**) to come into their assembly and attack **Paul's** character and ministry. One of them had apparently verbally assaulted **Paul (2:5-10)** during **the apostle's painful** visit to **Corinth** (see **Ao - Paul's Painful Visit**). That the majority of the church had not defended **him** from those attacked wounded **him** greatly. The visit was so discouraging that **he** didn't want to return to **Corinth** and expose **himself** to more **pain (2:1)**. As a result of the visit, **he** had written a sternly worded **letter**, rebuking

the Corinthians for **their** disloyalty and lack of **love** toward **him**. **Paul** sent **the letter** to **Corinth** with **Titus**, who was to bring **the Corinthians** response back to **him**. At that point the narrative broke off, and **Paul** entered into a prolonged digression about **his** ministry (see [Ar - Paul Reflects on His Ministry](#)). Here, in **7:5**, **the apostle** returned to the effects of that severe **letter**.

When Paul came into Macedonia from Troas in search of **Titus**, **his body had no rest**. Nothing had changed, **he** had no relief from **his** concern over the situation in **Corinth**. **On the contrary**, **he** had new concerns. What if **the** severe **letter** had made things worse? Was the breach with **the Corinthians** now irreparable? How would **they** treat **Titus**? Instead of hope, **Paul** found **himself faced** with **all kinds of troubles - altercations without, apprehensions within**. **But God, who encourages the downhearted, encouraged us with the arrival of Titus**, which brought **joy** to **Paul's** heart (**7:5-6**)! The report was good. There were still some unresolved problems (which **Paul** addressed in **Chapters 10-13**), but the majority of **Corinthian** believers had repented and reaffirmed **their** loyalty to **the apostle** and the truth **he** taught, which brought **him** immense relief.

This very personal section offers profound insights into restoring broken relationships. It lists seven signs of a genuine desire for real restoration. And though the context is the relationship between a pastor and his congregation, these principles are vital for restoring any broken relationship.¹⁷⁷

1. Loyalty (7:7): As noted above, **Titus'** return **encouraged Paul**. However, **the apostle was not only comforted by his arrival, but also how encouraged he was by the Corinthians**. **Titus** shared **Paul's** concern over **the Corinthians'** rebellion and no doubt viewed **his** mission to **Corinth** with some anxiety, not knowing what to expect. But **the Corinthians** brought **him comfort** and **joy** by **their** repentant attitude. **They** had responded properly to **the** severe **letter**. Specifically, **Titus told Paul how the Corinthians longed to see him, how distressed they were over his situation, and how zealous they were for his defense**. Taken all together, this points to **their** loyalty to **Paul**. Their attitude was not one of grudging acceptance of **Paul's** apostolic authority. **They longed to see him**. Realizing that **their sin** had caused **him pain**, **they were distressed over** the breach in **their** relationship. **They** also expressed **zeal**, both to restore **their** relationship with **Paul** and to defend **him** against any further attacks. **Their** loyalty **encouraged Paul** so much that the **news made him even happier** than **Titus'** return!

2. Repentance (7:8-10): The Corinthians not only responded correctly to **Paul** but also to **God**. **They** reaffirmed **their** loyalty to **the apostle** and acknowledged **their** disloyalty to **him** as a **sin** against **God**. That recognition is essential to restoring broken relationships. **Paul** knew that **he** had **caused the Corinthians pain by the** severe **letter** that **he** had sent **them**. And, as his parenthetical statement: **I do not regret it. Even if I did regret it before** reveals, **he** did experience temporary remorse over writing that **letter**. While **he** anxiously waited for **Titus** to return with **the Corinthians'** response, **the apostle** worried that **the letter** might have made things worse. **That letter did** in fact cause **them distress, though only for a short time (7:8)**.

Sometimes confronting **sin** requires going beyond what **love** and compassion might be comfortable with. But it is necessary to do so, because **sin** is a deadly killer. Paul was not an abusive, harsh disciplinarian, but a reluctant one, and **he** took no **joy** in causing temporary **pain** to **the Corinthians**. **He** was like a father with mixed feelings about disciplining a **beloved** child. But what motivated **him** to write **the** severe **letter** was **his love** for **them**, the truth, and **his** fear of the consequences of **their sin**. Despite **his** temporary **regret**, **Paul** knew that disciplining **the Corinthians' sin** had to be done.

There are times in the ministry when strong confrontational words are necessary. **Sin** crouches at the door; **false apostles** are everywhere, Satan constantly seeks to destroy the work of **God**. The faithful shepherd must not shrink from calling his sheep to obedience to Scripture. Therefore, **Paul** could **rejoice, not that the Corinthians were pained, but because the pain led them to turn back to God**. **His** regret vanished when **he** saw the fruit of **their pain**. **For you handled the pain in God's way, so that you were not harmed by us at all. Pain handled in God's way produces a turning from sin to God which leads to salvation, and there is nothing to regret in that (7:9-10a)**! The progression is obvious: confrontation of **sin** leads to **pain** and sorrow, which lead to repentance, which leads to **salvation**.¹⁷⁸

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being such a wise **Father**! Thank you for **Your** perfect **love** and holiness. **You** are never cruel in correcting, but **You** always **discipline lovingly**. **You** seek to bring me to joy, when I walk in obedience and fellowship with **You**. **"My child, do not take lightly the discipline of ADONAI or lose heart when you are corrected by Him, because ADONAI disciplines the one He loves and punishes every child He accepts."** (Hebrews 12:5-6). **You** have the perfect balance of punishment for **sin** in **Your** correction and **loving***

*forgiveness upon repentance. May **You** guide me to follow **Your** example of not avoiding discipline when it is needed, but in doing it with love and kindness. In your holy **Son's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*



But pain handled in the world's way produces only death (7:10b). There are two ways of handling pain. Ungodly, **worldly** sorrow, merely being sad or experiencing pain, has no virtue in it. It is concerned with self, not **ADONAI** or others who have been harmed; and it leads to self-hatred, self-pity, depression, despair and death. **Godly** sorrow, on the other hand, leads to repentance (Hebrew: *t'shuvah*), turning from **sin** to **God**, making restitution for wrongs, and resolving to act righteously. **Ha'Shem** is not interested in one's merely feeling sorry for having **sinned**, but in one's resolute, turning from **sin** and not doing it again when tempted with a similar situation in the future.¹⁷⁹

3. Purity (7:11): To **Paul's** great relief, **the Corinthians proved themselves blameless** (Greek: *hagnos*, meaning *innocent* or *free from sin*) **in the matter.** **They** demonstrated the genuineness of **their** repentance by **their** purity. This verse lists seven characteristics of purity that true repentance produces, and it provides the clearest definition of repentance found anywhere in the Bible. **Paul** introduced those characteristics with the emphatic phrase **for just look**, which indicated **his** overwhelming **joy.** **The apostle** was excited by **Titus'** report of the improved situation at **Corinth.** The repeated use of the comparative word **what** in the Greek before each characteristic underscored the intense emotion felt by **Paul.**

First, **what handling the pain God's way produced in you! What earnest diligence.** **Their** godly sorrow produced an eagerness for righteousness on **their** part. It ended the indifference toward **Paul** and **their** complacency about **their sin.** **They** were eager to make things right, and to restore **their** broken relationship with

the apostle.

Second, **what eagerness to clear your name** (Greek: *apologia*, meaning *vindication or a speech in defense of*). It describes **Paul's vindicating himself** before the mob at **Jerusalem (Acts 22:1 and 25:16)**, **his defense of his rights as an apostle (First Corinthians 9:3)**, **his defense of the Gospel (Philippians 1:7 and 16)**, and **his defense before the Roman authorities (Second Timothy 4:16)**. **The Corinthians** had a strong desire to **clear their name**, remove the stigma of **their sin**, rid **themselves of their** guilt, and prove **themselves** trustworthy. Therefore, **they** made sure that all who had known of **their sin** then knew about **their** repentance.

Third, **what indignation. The Corinthians** were outraged over **their sin; they** were angry that **they** had brought shame on **themselves**, offended **Paul**, and **sinned** against **God**. Now **they** hated **the sin** that **they** had previously cherished (**Romans 6:21**).

Fourth, **what fear. The Corinthians' fear** proved the genuineness of **their** repentance. **They** had humble **fear** and awe of **ADONAI** as **the One** who disciplines (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz - God Disciplines His Children**). **Their** brash, bold **sinning** had turned into a respectful concern that **they** no longer disobey and dishonor **Him**.

Fifth, **what longing. The Corinthians' repentance** resulted in a longing or yearning to see **their** relationship with **Paul** and **the Lord** restored.

Sixth, **what zeal. The Corinthians** experienced a renewed **zeal** for holiness. **Zeal** is a combination of **love** and hate. It produces a strong **love** that hates anything that would harm the object of **love**. **Yeshua Messiah** expressed both aspects of **zeal** when **He** cleansed **the Temple** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Iv - Jesus Entered the Temple Area and Drove Out All Who Were Buying and Selling**). It was **His** passionate **love** for **His Father's House** that caused **Him** to hate the terrible **sin** that defiled it.

Seventh, **what readiness to make things right!** This was the evidence of **their** repentance. Truly repentant people have a strong desire to see justice done and to make restitution for the wrongs they have committed (**2:6-7**). Instead of making excuses, **the Corinthians** accepted the full responsibility of **their sins**. Therefore, repentance had brought purity to the **sinning** believers in the **Corinthian** church,

and every aspect of **their** lives reflected it.

4. Devotion (7:12): Because of **the Corinthians'** immaturity and **sinfulness**, **they** were **worldly and living by merely human standards (First Corinthians 3:3)**. As a result, **they** had lost touch with how **they** truly felt about **Paul**. So one of **the apostles'** goals was to strip away **their sinful, wordly** attitudes and reveal to **the Corinthians** **their** real attitude toward **him**. **Paul** led up to **his** point by first eliminating other potential reasons for writing. This roundabout approach served to heighten the dramatic effect of **his** words. When **he wrote the severe letter, it was not for the sake of either the one who did the wrong. He** did not write primarily to condemn the man who had caused him so much grief during **his painful visit**. Nor was **his** main concern **for himself as the one wronged**. In other words, **he** was not seeking personal revenge. The most important reason **Paul** wrote **the** severe letter was **so that before God you could see for yourselves how deep is your devotion to us. His letter** peeled back the layers of deceit that had encrusted **their** hearts and let **them** see **Paul** as the trusted servant of **God** **they** had always known **him** to be.

5. Unity (7:13): **The Corinthians** repentance, purity, and renewed loyalty to **Paul** were **reason** enough for **him** to be **encouraged**. But **besides his own encouragement, Paul** received **even greater joy of seeing how happy Titus was** over **the Corinthians'** repentance and obedience. **Because of their** repentance, **his mind** had been **set at rest** Greek: *anapauo*, meaning *temporary relief as opposed to a permanent peace*). Though **he** was **overjoyed** at the good news from **Corinth**, **he** was wise enough to realize that pockets of dissent still existed. **Their** many factions (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Ak - Splits and Division in the Church at Corinth**) had resulted in the most chaotic church in the B'rit Chadashah. But now **they** had come together, seeking to restore **their** relationship to **Paul** and **his** teaching.

6. Obedience (7:14-15): As a result of their repentance, many of **the Corinthians** who had rebelled against **Paul** now submitted to **him (Hebrews 13:7)**. **He** had been confident that **they** were genuine believers and would repent when confronted with **their sin**. Therefore, **he** had **boasted somewhat to Titus** before sending **him** to **Corinth** that **the Corinthians** would respond **obediently**. **Paul**, in a sense, staked **his** reputation on the outcome, **and now**, after hearing the positive report from **Titus**, was relieved that **he had not been made to look foolish. On the contrary, just as everything Paul had said to them was true (2:17, 4:2, 6:7), so too our boasting in front of Titus has proved true**

(7:14). His truthfulness and discernment were vindicated by **the Corinthians' obedient** response. It meant that **his** integrity, and thus **his** usefulness to **them** as a servant of **God** remained intact.

The Corinthians' received **Paul's** representative, **Titus, with reverence and respect (First Corinthians 2:3; Ephesians 6:5; Philippians 2:12)**. This had calmed **Titus'** fears and caused **his affection for them** to be **all the greater as he remembers how ready you were to obey (7:15)**. Their willing **obedience to the Word of God** proved the genuineness of **the Corinthians'** repentance. When people are truly repentant, they submit to the commands of Scripture without hesitation. To have a congregation of such **obedient** people brought **joy** to the hearts of **Titus** and **Paul**.

7. Trust (7:16): I am glad that I can have such complete confidence (Greek: *tharreo*, means *to be courageous* or *to dare*) **in you. Paul's** reaffirmation of his trust in **the Corinthians** brought closure to the issue. **Paul** had the courage to entrust **himself** to **the Corinthians** once again and dare to believe that **they** would not fail **him**. This is a fitting climax to the second section of the book, **Chapters 1-7** (see **Ak - Paul Defends His Ministry**). **The Corinthians'** repentance encouraged **Paul** to share with **them** a project that was dear to **his** heart, the collection for the needy Jewish believers in Jerusalem (see **Bm - The Call to Complete the Collection**). It also gave **him** the boldness to confront the last remaining pocket of resistance to **his** apostolic authority (see **Br - Paul Defends His Apostolic Authority**).¹⁸⁰