

# Strength Through Devotion

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Sunday, September 21, 2025

*Start with Application Testimony*

- **Last week's exhortation:** Identify a lingering partnership you have with the world, and break it this week.

## INTRO

- **We are going verse-by-verse, in a topical study through I & II Corinthians**
  - **Current Topic:** Church Relationship – The holy work of being the Body of Christ.
    - In this topic, we've been learning the importance of committing to the work of relationship within the church, and how to actually go about it. The church isn't an organization unified around shared beliefs, it is a family built on and sustained in the love of God. When we talk about the holy work of being the Body of Christ, we are talking about the real, difficult, daily effort of putting aside our selfishness and sin and living in authentic, productive loving relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.
    - In today's lesson, we are going to talk about devotion: Jesus' command to be devoted to one another, the cost of being devoted to one another, and the reward we receive for being devoted to one another in the church.

# READ

## 2 Corinthians 7:2–16 CSB

<sup>2</sup> Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, corrupted no one, taken advantage of no one. <sup>3</sup> I don't say this to condemn you, since I have already said that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. <sup>4</sup> I am very frank with you; I have great pride in you. I am filled with encouragement; I am overflowing with joy in all our afflictions. <sup>5</sup> In fact, when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest. Instead, we were troubled in every way: conflicts on the outside, fears within. <sup>6</sup> But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the arrival of Titus, <sup>7</sup> and not only by his arrival but also by the comfort he received from you. He told us about your deep longing, your sorrow, and your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more. <sup>8</sup> For even if I grieved you with my letter, I don't regret it. And if I regretted it—since I saw that the letter grieved you, yet only for a while—<sup>9</sup> I now rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance. For you were grieved as God willed, so that you didn't experience any loss from us. <sup>10</sup> For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death. <sup>11</sup> For consider how much diligence this very thing—this grieving as God wills—has produced in you: what a desire to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what deep longing, what zeal, what justice! In every way you showed yourselves to be pure in this matter. <sup>12</sup> So even though I wrote to you, it was not because of the one who did wrong, or because of the one who was wronged, but in order that your devotion to us might be made plain to you in the sight of God. <sup>13</sup> For this reason we have been comforted. In addition to our own comfort, we rejoiced even more over the joy Titus had, because his spirit was refreshed by all of you. <sup>14</sup> For if I have

made any boast to him about you, I have not been disappointed; but as I have spoken everything to you in truth, so our boasting to Titus has also turned out to be the truth. <sup>15</sup> And his affection toward you is even greater as he remembers the obedience of all of you, and how you received him with fear and trembling. <sup>16</sup> I rejoice that I have complete confidence in you.

## EXAMINE

### #1 | We must be devoted to one another

#### 1. **We must love one another with the same intensity of love we receive from God.**

a. John 13:34–35 *“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

i. This is a really high calling and great expectation – in fact it feels impossible – but it is what Jesus wants us to do with the love we receive from Him.

1. *Remember our devotion to one another is not just human effort – it’s the overflow of God’s own devotion to us, poured into our hearts by the Spirit (Romans 5:5) and the Holy Spirit will empower us with a supernatural capacity for love when we pursue love for one another. (1 Thess. 4:9–10)*

#### 2. **The examples in today’s passage show the kind of love and devotion we should have for one another.**

a. 2 Corinthians 7:3 *“...you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.”*

b. 2 Corinthians 7:6–7 “...God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the arrival of Titus, and not only by his arrival but also by the comfort he received from you. He told us about your deep longing, your sorrow, and your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.”

i. Consider the emotional reactions described here – their whole selves were invested in the relationships with one another.

1. *Paul was deeply comforted by Titus’ safe return and overjoyed to learn that the Corinthians, far from forsaking him, had received his letter with heartfelt devotion, showing their enduring love and acceptance of him as their spiritual father.*

## **#2 | Devotion means doing the difficult things together**

1. **Being devoted to one another means doing whatever is needed for growth and health – even if it’s hard.**

a. 2 Corinthians 7:8–9 “For even if I grieved you with my letter, I don’t regret it. And if I regretted it...I now rejoice...because your grief led to repentance...”

i. Paul was willing to cause some pain in the short-term, in order to bring health in the long-term. He wanted to spare them pain, but he wanted even more to help them grow.

2. **Being devoted to one another also means leaning into the process and not running away when things get hard.**

a. 2 Corinthians 7:11 “For consider how much diligence this very thing—this grieving as God wills—has produced in you: what a desire to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what deep longing, what zeal,

*what justice! In every way you showed yourselves to be pure in this matter.”*

- i. Part of Paul’s joy and comfort came from the Corinthians mature response to the very confrontational letter he had Titus deliver to them.
  - 1. *Their repentance itself was an act of love — their willingness to change was not only obedience to God, it was a renewed devotion to Paul and to the community.*
- ii. Real devotion means receiving each other’s growth-focused efforts with openness and staying committed to the relationship, even when those efforts put strain on the relationship.
  - 1. *It is this kind of commitment that God will use to grow us into truly mature people.*

### **#3 | When we do the difficult things together, our mutual devotion grows stronger**

- 1. **Consider the emotional reaction of Titus, being involved in this process between Paul and the Corinthians.**
  - a. 2 Corinthians 7:13,15 “*...In addition to our own comfort, we rejoiced even more over the joy Titus had, because his spirit was refreshed by all of you... And his affection toward you is even greater as he remembers the obedience of all of you, and how you received him with fear and trembling.*”

i. Notice how their devotion didn't just comfort Paul, it also refreshed Titus? Devotion always multiplies outward and impacts the whole community.

1. *Our spirits and hearts lack refreshment and affection when we haven't leaned into the hard work of relationship.*

ii. Doing the hard work won't cost us relationships – it will build stronger ones.

1. *True relationships, grounded in Christ, can survive offense when both sides lean into the hard work of devotion.*

**2. Our commitment to the process gives us front row seats to one another's growth, which we get to celebrate together.**

a. 2 Corinthians 7:14,16 *"For if I have made any boast to him about you, I have not been disappointed; but as I have spoken everything to you in truth, so our boasting to Titus has also turned out to be the truth... I rejoice that I have complete confidence in you."* `

i. Struggling and experiencing victory together produces a joy and a bond of love that can sustain us through every trial of life.

1. *And all of this points us back to Jesus, whose own devotion carried Him through the cross for us. As we imitate His love, empowered by His Spirit, our devotion to one another becomes a living testimony to the truth of the Gospel.*

## REFLECT

### ***Let's take a moment to pray***

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our attention and lead our conversation, helping us see and understand what He wants us to apply in our lives.

## APPLY

### **Process the passage together with these questions:**

- How does Paul's statement, "you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together" (v. 3), challenge the way we think about relationships in the church?
- Look again at verse 10. What is the difference between grief that leads to life and grief that leads to death?
- What are some ways we can show devotion when a relationship feels strained?

### **Where we want to "land the plane"**

- Real devotion isn't just warm feelings — it's choosing to love with the same devotion Christ has shown us. That means leaning in when things get hard, receiving each other's efforts to help us grow, and refusing to walk away when the relationship feels strained. When we stay committed in love, even through correction and pain, God uses it to build maturity and stronger bonds of trust. This is how our life together becomes a living witness of Jesus' love to the world.

## Exhortation for the Week

- Challenge the selfishness inside you. Humble yourself. Act in love towards others in the church this week.

## FOOTNOTES

1. **Paul's frame of mind and body** before Titus' arrival was far from placid (cf. 2:13). He had no rest (anesis, "relief"; also used in 2:13; 8:13). The great apostle did not always ride a spiritual crest, which he was not hesitant to admit (cf. 2:4; 6:10). He candidly admitted that his conflicts ... fears and depression (downcast) were brought on by apparent opposition or persecution in Macedonia, by anxiety about Titus' well-being, by his reception by the Corinthians, and by their response to his letter. *David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 571.*
2. **What was the "painful letter" Paul keeps referring to?** The top 3 options in modern scholarship:
  - a. **Option 1) A now-lost letter (written between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians)**
    - i. Many standard introductions and commentaries that read 2 Corinthians as a unified letter conclude the "tearful letter" did exist but wasn't preserved. For example, Fredrick Long summarizes Ben Witherington's view: "Witherington...does not equate 1 Corinthians with the letter of tears (which Witherington believes is simply lost)."



- ii. A mainstream reference survey likewise notes the field's tilt toward an additional letter and lists "lost" as one of the two principal explanations: "Most contemporary views consider the probability of another letter... The other reply is that the letter has been lost."
- iii. A recent academic review of Raymond Collins's 2 Corinthians (Paideia) also describes "a separate trip and lost letter to Corinth," reflecting how common this reconstruction is in current scholarship.
- iv. **Why scholars choose this:** It lets 2 Corinthians remain intact (no cut-and-paste theory required) and fits the storyline in 2 Cor 1–7 (Titus carrying that earlier stern letter and then reporting back).

b. **Option 2) The "tearful letter" is preserved in 2 Corinthians 10–13**

- i. A classic defense is L. L. Welborn's study arguing that 2 Cor 10:1–13:10 is the very letter Paul mentions: "identifies 2 Cor. 10:1–13:10 with the 'letter of tears'."
- ii. More broadly, the sharp tonal shift in 2 Cor—conciliatory in chs. 1–9, confrontational in chs. 10–13—has led many to think the book is a composite: "This abrupt change in tone leads many scholars to think 2 Corinthians is a composite of two or more letters..." while others reply that the change can be rhetorical rather than editorial.
- iii. **Why scholars choose this:** The severity of 10–13 sounds like what a "letter written...with many tears" (2 Cor 2:4) might have looked like; the composition hypothesis explains the tone break.

c. **Option 3) The "tearful letter" was 1 Corinthians**

- i. This view is now a minority, but it has had serious advocates. Long reports Niels Hyldahl's conclusion: "the letter of tears is 1 Corinthians," and notes others who argue similarly.
- ii. **Why most do not choose this:** The same reference survey bluntly says it's "improbable that Paul's state of mind when writing 1 Corinthians can be described by his words in 2 Corinthians 2:4," i.e., "out of great distress...with many tears."

d. **Where the consensus sits (as of now)**

- i. There isn't unanimity. But if you force a generalization across mainstream introductions and many recent commentaries, the most common reconstruction is: Paul wrote a separate, now-lost "tearful" letter between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians (delivered by Titus); 2 Corinthians itself is a single, later letter responding to how that severe note landed. The encyclopedia survey captures this trajectory ("most...consider the probability of another letter...[and] the letter has been lost"), while still acknowledging the robust minority that identifies the letter with 2 Cor 10-13.
- ii. The 1 Corinthians = tearful letter proposal persists in scholarly literature (e.g., Hyldahl), but it's comparatively less adopted today, partly because 1 Cor's tone doesn't match Paul's description of the "many tears."