



2 Corinthians 7:2-16 How to Confront a Friend

Summary: Confrontation between Christians is motivated by love, received in humility, and guided by God who comforts and confronts each of us.

If you have ever had to say something hard to a friend or family member or anyone else in your life, or if you have ever had someone say something hard to you, you'll want to pay special attention to the section of Scripture we're reading this morning because we're going to take a close up look at how to confront a friend, how to receive confrontation, and the difference between repentance and regret.

Confrontation doesn't always go well. It's filled with opportunities for disaster. So, don't go around looking for confrontation, but don't shy away from it either. Because, if you really love someone, you'll say what needs to be said. And, if they really know they're loved, there's a chance they'll hear it, respond well, and things will improve - especially if both parties are seeking to know and follow God.

That's exactly what happened in Corinth. Paul wrote Second Corinthians after learning the church received his confrontation well. They heard what he said in a previous letter, took it to heart, and changed. So, let's dig into how things played out and see what we can learn about God, about love, about conflict, and about change. Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 7:2 Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. **3** I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. **4** Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation. **5** For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. **6** Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, **7** and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more. **8** For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. **9** Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

Alright, I know that's a lot, so let's point out some of the things he's saying. First, you need to know that Second Corinthians is actually more like Third Corinthians at least. But the middle letters, including the one he refers to here as an [epistle](#) in verse 8, were not kept by

the church as Scripture. Paul wrote that letter to address some problems in the church and asked Titus to deliver it – we learned all that back in chapters one and two. Here, we learn that they received the letter well and Paul is pumped by their response to it even while he encourages them to keep growing in spiritual maturity.

So let's take a look at some of the factors involved.

First, it's hard to miss the fact that Paul really, really cared about the Corinthians and he was able to point to his personal integrity to authenticate his motives. He says in verse 3 **We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.** In other words, "you know when I said hard things to you, it wasn't about me. It was out of love and concern for you."

Look at what he writes in verse 4: **you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.** This is from the pen of the man who said

Phil 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

So, to live is Christ, but also to be together with the Corinthians. To die is gain, but also to die together with the Corinthians.

Paul sees life and death fully integrated with Christ and others. He emphasizes both the vertical aspect of the Christian life – connection with Christ, to live by, for, and through Him, and to one day be with Him forever. But until that day, to also live out the faith horizontally, to live by, for, with and through others connected by the love of Christ. Christ is the head and we are the body. This is normal Christian life for Paul.

But this love for one another is something of an endangered species spiritually speaking. We have so emphasized the place of the individual in recent church history that we have lost the balancing role of the community. Each brick is important, but so is the entire wall. When you read Scripture, you find time and time again this emphasis on both – your personal relationship with God, but *also* your personal connection with others, and a willingness, like Christ, to be used for the good of others, to care deeply about others, and even, at times to suffer and sacrifice for others.

Paul had that kind of concern for the church in Corinth and he pointed to it as evidence.

Can I encourage you to ask God for this kind of burden, this kind of concern for those He has placed in your life? If you serve in Children's Ministry, or lead a home group, if you're teaching a devotion, or leading a small group, if you're volunteering with the youth or young adults, would you offer up your shoulders, your heart, your mind, your hands to God and ask Him to give you *this* kind of concern for the people you serve – that they would be **in [y]our hearts, to die together and to live together?**

We talk so often of being increasingly available to God, this is one way to do that – to give more and more of your heart, mind, and strength, to caring about people who matter to God.

Chuck Smith used to say he wanted the people of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa to be the best fed and most loved. That's our goal here at City Gates as well – for you to feel like you're fed a steady, solid diet of Scripture, *and* that you find a home away from home and family away from family, all held together by the love of Christ and the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

But if our lives are spent together, bound together, connected to each other as God intends them to be, there will be times when we have to talk about hard things, when we have to point out sin, or call each other to correct an attitude or address some drift. And when that happens, hopefully, we'll be open to hear it, *because we know it's said in love*.

That's what happened between Paul and the Corinthians. But you need to know, like they did, that when he confronted them, it was an expression of love.

We live at a moment in history when the dominant philosophy of the culture says 'do what you want.' 'Find and express your authentic self.' "You do you."

And people are taking that to logical, but harmful extremes – encouraging others to make choices about their lives, relationships, and bodies that those people later regret but when they do, they don't know how to process the regret, because it was people in their lives who encouraged them to go in this direction in the first place and now that they're here, and they're still not satisfied, or happy, who can help them turn around? Where can they go?

Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is tell someone, you shouldn't do that. You need to knock that off. You need to get rid of that. You need to stop saying that. You need to change. I love you, and so I'm telling you, you're wrong.

That's not easy. Every parent, teacher, coach, and boss knows there are times when it's easier to let the situation go and not intervene because it's a mess, or because you're tired, or because you already said something once and it didn't change. And you don't feel like dealing with it again. But is that love?

We have to remember: the goal of life is not to make things easy and comfortable but to make us holy, connected to God, pleasing to Him. And sometimes that means saying and doing hard things that produce sorrow, not just for the person you're correcting, but also for you.

Notice what Paul says about his own situation in verse 5 - he says, [when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears.](#)

This is the life of a man trying to live for Christ and others, trying to do everything right.

Christian, you need to know: a life lived for God and others is *not always easy*. We are tempted and tried by a very real devil and his very real demons. We live in a world that is falling apart, breaking down daily. And we are surrounded by people who make selfish choices that hurt others. It ain't all Disneyworld.

But God doesn't call you to an easy life, he calls you to a life of service during a spiritual war.

I remember being back in the Marine barracks in Japan in the late 90's and the North Koreans were causing problems again. We were all put on alert and some people started getting nervous about the prospect of going to war. And I remember this whole conversation as others asked them, 'what did you think you were getting into when you signed up for the Marines?' There's more to it than education benefits and fancy uniforms.

Well, we have people who are drawn to the church by the prospect of finding friendly people, hearing encouraging things from a compelling speaker up front, and receiving helpful tips for living a good life, but they don't realize or accept that there's also a spiritual war going on. It's not going to be easy, sometimes *our bodies [have] no rest, [we're] troubled on every side. Outside [are] conflicts, inside [are] fears. And that doesn't mean you're doing something wrong, that's just the way it is.*

But, here's the great part – even in the worst of it, *you're never truly alone*. Look at

6 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

If you are taking notes this morning, would you write this down: *God comforts the downcast*. This is who He is and what He does. This is foundational to His character. When you read Scripture, especially in places like the Psalms, you find people in need coming to God - people in emotional distress, people facing complex situations, people who suffer physically, people who have no place else to go.

And Jesus encourages it. Right outside the back wall, behind the welcome table are the words of Jesus.

Matthew 11:28 *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

This is why we keep saying, invite God into your mess. Into your problem. Into your bad attitude. Personally, one of my repeated prayers right now is, "God, I don't want to be frustrated by things that don't frustrate You." Because I feel frustrated. And I don't think it's wrong to be frustrated. But I feel it *a lot*. And I don't want to waste my frustration on things that don't frustrate God. So, I'm inviting Him in. Asking for His comfort. Asking for His

approach. Asking for His attitude about things *because this is what He does* – He comforts us in our need.

Sometimes God comforts us directly. Sometimes He ministers to us in our quiet time, or as we're listening to worship music, or seemingly out of nowhere. He shows up and puts His hand directly on our need.

At other times, He sends us encouragement through someone else. Paul experienced it two ways. First, he was encouraged just to see his friend Titus again. And second, he was encouraged because Titus brought such good news about the Christians in Corinth.

We spoke about this in an earlier study, but I'll bring it up again – the word for comfort here comes from the Greek word *parakaleo*, a term that Jesus also uses to describe the role of the Holy Spirit in John 14. The point is, that at times God uses other people to be His hands and feet. He sends people, who are full of the Spirit (the *paraclete*) to encourage (*parakaleo*) you. And vice versa, He sends you to them. You get to participate in His divine work.

My daughter has this way of coming over to me, wrapping her arms around me, looking up, and smiling – it's like she's taking this pitcher full of encouragement from her heart and pouring into mine. She's twelve. And it works.

I say that so that you'll know - there's no age or status requirement for this. You just need to care about other people and be sensitive to how and where God wants to use you. Paul was like a mentor to Titus, but he was still able to be encouraged by him. Don't miss the encouragement God might want to send you because it comes from someone smaller. And don't miss the opportunity God wants to give you to encourage someone you perceive as bigger. Be open, be available.

There are plenty of downcast people, even in the church, who need to be comforted by God both directly and indirectly. When you see them, or God brings them to your mind, pray for them, and if God sends you, go to them, and be encouraging. Because this is what God does, He comforts the downcast.

Well, that brings us to how the Corinthians responded when Paul confronted them. We learn that they heard what Paul said, received it, felt it, and changed. In other words, they responded, emotionally, intellectually, and practically. Though, as we all know, that's not always case. In fact, Paul contrasts two different ways to respond when we're confronted. He says:

10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. 11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. 12 Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done

the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.

OK, very important stuff here. Two ways to respond when someone points things out in our lives. We can react with worldly sorrow or Godly sorrow.

It's important to note: both start with sorrow. Both have an emotional reaction to what has happened or been done, they experience remorse. But sorrow can lead in two separate directions. Worldly sorrow leads to guilt, shame, or frustration at being caught, or told on. World sorrow is the sorrow of being exposed and having a mess to deal with now. Worldly sorrow is centered on how things turned out. Godly sorrow is sorrow over ever having done it in the first place.

If you visit the jail with Pastor Vic, you will find plenty of people who are *sorry* about what happened, but they're not all ready to change. And that is why some wind up right back inside when they're released.

But that doesn't mean people on the outside are any better. Plenty of people are living with things they're *sorry* about, but they're not ready to change. That's why you keep going back to the thing you know you shouldn't do, falling into the same behavior again. You don't want anyone to know - or you don't want them to find out it's still going on - you'd be really *sorry* if they did. But are you ready to repent? Are you ready to change?

Because if you're not, the truth is, *you probably won't*.

In Scripture we see a powerful contrast between worldly and godly sorrow in the lives of two men. One who tried to deal with things on his own while the other who invited God in.

Peter and Judas both betrayed Jesus on the same day. He had warned each of them that it would happen (Matt 26:23, 34). He gave each of them a way out. When Judas showed up to betray Him, Jesus asked (Matt 26:50) "Friend, why have you come?" When Peter stood in the courtyard denying he knew Jesus, Jesus looked right at him (Luke 22:61) and Peter realized what he was doing. After betraying and denying Him, both felt sorry for what they had done.

But Judas took it out on himself. He tried to give back the money and then went out and took his own life. Peter took his sorrow to God. He repented. That is, he reversed course. He changed direction. And as a result, Jesus forgave him, restored him, and gave him a greater ministry.

Friends, just because you've sinned doesn't mean you're irreparably broken. Nor are you left to deal with it on your own. If you invite God in - repent, and return to Him - He can, and will, forgive you, rebuild you, restore you and help you really change. Look at what happened with the Corinthians.

11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Friends, you need more than just an emotional reaction to what you've done. You need both cognitive and behavioral change guided by God's Word and empowered by His Spirit. You need a new way of thinking about what you've done, and a new way of living. And that can only happen by the grace of God – so, again if you're really sorry, if you're ready to change, invite Him in.

Ask Him to give you this same kind of [diligence](#), [indignation](#), [fear](#), [vehement desire](#), and [zeal](#) for change. Ask Him to help you clear yourself and prove yourself by His grace and with His help. And, pray this way for others. Because, with God, change is possible. Look at how it all ended for Paul and the Corinthians:

13 Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 14 For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. 15 And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. 16 Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.

The relationship that Paul so valued was restored. They read his letter, heard what he had to say, realized it was right, and took appropriate action. Paul did the hard thing by speaking up and they did the hard thing by listening up. And as a result, they took good care of Titus and send him back to Paul who was greatly encouraged and everything ends well. We know that's not always the case, *but sometimes it is* and you never know how things will turn out, so we always need to be ready to obey.

I'll summarize like this: we've seen what happened when Paul confronted the Corinthians. He spoke up because something needed to be said. But he relied on what they knew about his personal integrity and his love for them to authenticate the message and the motivation behind it. He was honestly and sincerely seeking their good. Fortunately, they received it that way. They heard what he was talking about, saw it the same way, and they were sorry. But more than that, they had godly sorrow that led them to change. And when they did, it caused both Titus and Paul to rejoice.

Friends, this is all just a replay of the same situation that happens between us and God. He confronts you on your sin. There are things happening in your life that should not be happening. There are things that are not happening in your life that should be. And God comes you and He speaks to you about it.

You feel a sense a sense of sorrow or shame, at least in the beginning. Sometimes you build a shield around it, or grow a callous over it, but there was a time when you felt sorrow or shame about it, and that feeling is still there occasionally.

The question is, will you handle it like Judas or Peter? Will you keep trying to deal with it on your own, or will you invite God in? Are you going to be [diligent](#) and [zealous](#) in dealing with it, or will you excuse it and delay?

If you invite God in, I can tell you what will happen. He will come. And the angels will rejoice. Like Paul rejoicing over the news of the Corinthians. Like the father running to greet the Prodigal Son. Zephaniah (3:17) says when you turn to God He will “[delight in you with gladness...He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.](#)” He desires your good, and it is found when you surrender wholly and completely to Him in the areas where He is confronting you. Today it is my great hope, like Paul for the Corinthians, that you will hear God when He speaks and surrender.

Let's pray



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 7:2-16 How to Confront a Friend

Summary: Confrontation between Christians is motivated by love, received in humility, and guided by God who comforts and confronts each of us.

- Describe a time when you or someone else was confronted. Did it go well? Why or why not? How many of the factors involved in the sermon present (i.e. obvious integrity on the part of the person confronting, obvious love, wordly vs godly sorrow, etc.)?
- How do you know when to speak up and address an issue and when to just let it go?
- In 2 Cor 7:4 Paul says “[you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.](#)” What does that look like in your life today? At City Gates? How can we cultivate it more?
- Why does knowing that you are loved make it easier to receive correction, rebuke, or guidance?
 - Why do we still bristle at times to receive correction, even under these circumstances?
 - How can knowing this help you prepare for receiving correction in the future?
 - How can knowing this help you when giving correction?
- Do you expect the church to be the way some people view the military: lots of benefits and fancy uniforms but not ready for war? How much conflict do you think a Christian should expect to participate in? Where do you think that conflict should come from or be about?
- How has God proven Himself to you as One who comforts the downcast?
 - Cross-reference 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and Isaiah 49:13
 - Who has He sent to encourage you?
 - Who has He sent you to encourage?
- Have you learned the difference between worldly and godly sorrow?
 - What do the following verses have to say about the importance of repentance? Mark 1:15; Matt 4:17; Acts 2:38-39, 3:19