

## Enduring With Believers

2Corinthians 7:2-7

One of the things I am thankful for in life is being taught what it is to do a hard day's work.

I can't say I enjoyed learning that lesson as a boy, but I can say that it served me well many times in my life.

One of things hard work can do is test your physical limits.

I learned how much I could carry in a wheel barrel without dumping it.

I learned how much of a shovel full of dirt I could move.

I learned how many shingles I could carry up a ladder.

I learned what it was like to wake up in the morning and be stiff as a board with aching muscles from the previous day's labours.

I'm sure many of you have had that experience and I'm sorry to say that the older we get the more frequent that experience seems to be and we don't have to work as hard to get there.

If you have ever had that experience of lying in bed amazed at the pain you are feeling in muscles you didn't even know you had, then you likely also know what it is like to feel that way when you know you are supposed to get up and do it again.

Amazingly, if you manage to get to a vertical position and get dressed and go at it again it gets easier over time.

Your muscles begin to loosen up and your body begins to adapt and after a while it is not as bad as it was.

I know for most of us that has a diminishing return as we get older, but by and large, if you do not suffer from any kind of medical condition, the more you do the more you are able to do.

The key is sticking at it.

You have to be willing to put on your boots and pick up your tools and do it again.

Anyone who has ever been stretched in that way comes to a moment when they want to quit.

Whether it is from manual labour, sports, exercise, or something else if you have pushed your physical limits you have to decide whether or not you are going to do it again.

There is a moment where you question the worth of what you are doing and you wonder whether or not you have it in you to carry on.

In my experience the choice to carry on often produces good things in your life and that is especially true for the Christian.

Sticking at things is a hallmark of being a follower of Jesus.

We are a persevering people.

We are to persevere in faith, endure in the pursuit of what is right in the eyes of God, and we are to endure with one another.

While I firmly believe that we cannot remain in ongoing fellowship with people who claim to be Christians but deny Christ and the authority of His Word, we are to have an unwavering commitment to genuine believers.

It is also true that genuine believers are still sinners. The book of James tells us that “we all stumble in many ways.”

Because that is true our commitment to one another is going to be tested from time to time.

In the face of that God calls us to endure in our commitment to other Christians.

[That is the example set before us in our text this morning **2Corinthians 7:2-7**. Leading up to this chapter it is clear that there has been a good amount of tension between the apostle Paul and the Corinthian believers. It would have been easy for Paul to walk away from them, but what we find in these verses is that he is enduring with them and wants them to endure with him. From what is written here we can learn what it takes to endure with believers and also two benefits or blessings that can come from sticking with it. First we learn that...]

**Point #1 – Enduring with believers takes integrity and commitment. (Verses 2-3)**

If a group of Christians is going to remain together over the long haul, then honesty and perseverance needs to be a high priority.

Verse two opens with a command, listen. (Verse 2a)

He is going for something more here than let stay acquaintances even though we don't like each other because that is what God wants.

He is talking about having genuine affection here and it is a command.

It is a command Jesus Himself gave to His disciples. He said, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

How does Jesus love His people? He dies for them.

This is not butterflies in the stomach sort of stuff, this is courage, sacrifice, God glorifying feelings and action.

This is standing in the face of evil and laying down your life kind of love.

Paul is asking the Corinthians for what he has already given.

Back in chapter six verse 11 he describes his heart as “wide open towards” the Corinthians.

In other words despite the wounds inflicted upon him by people in the church he still has a deep desire for their fellowship.

He then tells us something of why he is enduring with these believers.  
(Verse 2)

As we read here Paul's claim about how he has acted toward the Corinthians believers we have to appreciate that he is speaking in objective terms.

Right and wrong are determined by God's law and that is clear in the original language here.

His actions have been right in the eyes of God.

The word 'corrupt' here has the sense of leading someone into evil and therefore towards destruction.

Nothing Paul has said or done has brought any spiritual harm to these believers.

Neither has his ministry among them been about personal gain.

In fact, he has worked hard to give rather than receive.

The point of all this is to say that he has acted with godly integrity towards these believers.

That, I believe, lays the foundation for what he says next in verse 3.

His point is not to say how great he is in order to say how bad they have been.

His point is to say he has no desire to hurt or abuse them, it is quite the opposite.

He tells them they are in his heart in both life and death.

In other words he feels a great sense of commitment to these believers through everything life might throw at them.

No matter what happens, no matter how deeply he has been hurt, he still cares about them and wants what is best for them.

He is committed to them.

[Most of us get the importance of integrity and commitment in life. If you have ever needed your car fixed and you have someone you know is honest and truthful, someone who will look out for you, and stand behind their work won't you take your car to that person? If they make a mistake are you going to kick them aside? If you have been going to them for years will they turn you away? Likely not, because you have developed a relationship that is worth keeping up.]

How much more should that be true among believers?

You know one the dangers that can creep into our hearts is having a 'me' centered view of the gospel and the church.

We can take the truth that Jesus died for me and put blinders on our hearts and minds and pay very little attention to the fact that Jesus died for you!

We can focus on the fact that others are supposed to treat me correctly and not worry too much about how we are supposed to care for others.

[Being a part of a local church is challenging at times, believe me I know that well. To remain in it takes endurance. We can't have endurance unless we are people of integrity and

commitment. To be sure that is challenging at times, but the picture that the apostle is painting for us here is not one of misery. Having told us about what it takes to endure with believers he then tells us about the blessing of it. One of the blessings mentioned here is that...]

**Point #2 – Enduring with believers is a source of encouragement. (Verses 4)**

Everyone goes through tough times in life, Christians are no exception to that rule. One of the great gifts that God intends to take place in the church is for followers of Jesus to build each other up even through trials.

One of the things that stands out about the life of Paul is the numbers of trials he went through.

He tells the believers back in chapter one that he was going through such an ‘affliction’ that he and his companions were ‘despairing of life’.

He mentions that word ‘affliction’ again here in **verse 4**.

He is holding nothing back in his command for them to “make room” in their hearts.

Why is he so fearless? Because it says, he has “great pride” in them.

Typically when we hear the word ‘pride’ negative images come to our mind and rightly so.

We think of pride of being self-absorbed and conceited.

We know that God is opposed to that kind of stuff.

What is critical to notice here is that Paul’s pride is in them rather than himself. We’ll see in few minutes that his pride in them is not really about them either.

Paul’s focus here is not on himself and therefore is not pride in the negative sense that we would normally think of it.

When the Bible talks about the pride of a self-centered nature it uses a different word than the one that is used here.

The word that is used here has the sense of ‘boasting’ or ‘confidence’.

His point here is that he is very confident that the believers in Corinth have not and will not turn their backs on him.

He believes that just like he is committed to them through thick and thin so too they will remain committed to him.

Do you see the effect of that there in the middle of the verse?

He says that he is “filled with comfort in **all** our affliction.”

That is an amazing statement.

To say things got bad at times for the apostle is an understatement and yet he is comforted by what he sees in the Corinthians.

To that he adds the statement, “I am overflowing with joy.”

Not a fake smile in the face real pain but life sustaining joy from the fellowship of other believers.

If he had bailed on this church he would have missed out on that encouragement.

[When I was a teen in youth group I got it into my head to learn guitar. It took a while before I could play anything resembling a song and it took a while after that before it sounded remotely o.k. My youth pastor at the time displayed great patience at helping a few of us along and the church display great patience as they put up with our lack of skill for many an evening service. It took a long while but sticking with it eventually paid off and now I have the privilege of picking up a guitar and playing a song. I've even had the double blessing of being able to get some other people started on the guitar. I would have missed that if I had quit.]

That same sort of thing happens with many people and the church.

Things get tough, they get mistreated and they quit.

Please believe me when I say I'm not trying to cast any stones here.

I know the pain inflicted by other people who claim to be Christians can run really deep.

But I also know that if you give up on other believers you will miss out on a source of great encouragement.

There is nothing like a believing friend coming along side you with the hope of the gospel.

There is nothing like faithful Christian who has been in your life for a long time crying with you.

There is nothing like walking together with the people of God through all of life.

[That is one of the great blessings of enduring with believers. Now someone might say, "I don't think that will ever happen. If I stick this thing out these people are never going to be a source of encouragement." I get why some people would think like that, but that kind of thinking is missing something very important. It is missing the fact that these things are always bigger than people. That is the third lesson of our text and another blessings of enduring with believers. It is that...]

### **Point #3 – Enduring with believers reveals God's work. (Verses 5-7)**

While it cannot be denied that challenging and heartbreaking things happen to us, often at the hands of people, getting to witness the LORD do a work in someone's life is an incredibly life giving gift.

### *He explains further why he can say that he is "overflowing with joy". (Verse 5-6)*

The situation sounds really serious.

They were physically exhausted, had ongoing trouble 'at every turn' and they were 'fighting without and fear within'.

Fighting without is no surprise for the apostle.

It's possible he meaning battling with opponents to the preaching of the gospel that are outside the church.

On many occasions local Jewish leaders stirred up trouble for him.

Other times makers of idols and people involved in demonic activity opposed their ministry.

He may also mean his having to fight with false teachers in the church.

Those battles are particularly wearisome and difficult.

Paul gets mixed up in stuff like that all the time so it is not surprising to find him mention it here.

What does strike me as a bit unusual is his mention of "fear within."

To say that the apostle was a man full of faith and courage is a modest assessment of his life to say the least, but here he is feeling fear.

He doesn't specifically say what he is fearful of.

Is it fear of physical harm? Fear of failure? Or perhaps its fear for the Corinthian believers, fearing that they may be lost to his opponents.

It could be any of those things and it is a reminder that everyone, even the apostle can struggle at times to trust the Lord.

Thankfully God conquers fear. In his affliction and fear it says God brought comfort "by the coming of Titus.

What did Titus bring that brought comfort? **(Verse 7)**

Titus brought news of the Corinthians.

Here is this church that seemed to be going off the rails, seemed to be turning their backs on Paul and the gospel, and as it turned out God was still doing a good work among them.

They had ministered well to Titus, they still had an affection for the apostle, and they had been mourning (likely over sin).

There was still good reason to think that these people had given their lives to Jesus.

That they recognized their need of rescue from the wrath of God and were clinging to Jesus death and resurrection to make them right with the LORD.

There was still love in their hearts for the Christ and His servants.

The result is that Paul "rejoiced still more."

[It reminds me of the parable of the prodigal son. You likely know the story. There is a young man who comes to his father and asks for his inheritance while his dad is still alive. He leaves

town lives it up wastes all his money and ends up getting a job feeding the pigs and being so hungry that he want to eat what the pigs are eating. Then he comes to his senses and goes home. Do you remember what the father does? While the son was still far off he runs out to meet him, embraces him, and throws a party. He rejoices that his son is home.]

I was chatting with someone the other day whose son was recently baptized after wandering from the LORD for multiple decades, I can tell you they are rejoicing.

That is what happens if you stick it out in the church, you see God do work in people's lives.

Remember back in verse 4 Paul talked about having "pride" in these believers and remember how I said the word there has the sense of "boasting".

Do you know what kind of boasting the Bible encourages?

Jeremiah 9:24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

Because the apostle is enduring with these believers he is seeing God and work.

*You know if you are a Christian and commit yourself to a local church for a considerable period of time it can be a long haul.*

There is ups and downs.

There is pain and hurt.

There will likely be times when you feel stretched to the limit and want to quit.

The challenge and the command of this text is to endure.

To answer that challenge we need to resolve to be people of integrity and commitment.

If you answer the challenge you will surely benefit in the long term.

You will benefit from the encouragement of other people committed to the LORD.

Even better than that you will benefit from getting to see the LORD at work in the lives of people.

It is easy to walk away but it is far better to endure with believers.