

2 Corinthians 7:5-16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 October 2026

Preacher: Joshua Russell

[0:00] As Ian's already said, we're working our way through 2 Corinthians at the moment. I'm going to read to us from verse 5, chapter 7, verse 5.

And you'll find an outline of my talk inside your bulletins as well if you want to follow along there. That might help you. The Apostle Paul writes, For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn, fighting without and fear within.

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 rejoice still more.

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. 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. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

[1:19] 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. 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.

Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoice still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. 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. And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.

I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you. This is the word of the Lord. Have you ever tried to rebuke someone at church?

[2:27] Has anyone ever tried to rebuke you? And how did it go? So, it's an important part of any healthy community, isn't it?

What the Greek boffins tell me about the New Testament words that we usually translate rebuke, because there are a few of them that come into English as rebuke, is that they mean to express strong disapproval of someone, to speak seriously, to warn, in order to prevent an action or bring one to an end.

Or again, another word in this kind of space, means to bring a person to the point of recognizing wrongdoing, to convict or convince them.

Some of the stronger words even have to do with striking someone. You might cut them to the heart. So, in Mark chapter 8, for instance, you remember Jesus was telling his disciples about the suffering he was about to go through, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

In other words, Peter took him aside and began to express strong disapproval of what Jesus was saying. No, no, no, no, no, no, Jesus. You are the Christ.

[3:48] For you, there is only glory and victory ahead. You seem to have got it all wrong this time. Haven't you read about King David's great victories? Of course, then Jesus, turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

Of course, Jesus didn't accept Peter's point of view, and we don't always have to concede to every rebuke that comes our way, actually.

Jesus never did. We might have to sometimes, but we don't always have to. Just because someone tries to rebuke you doesn't mean they're always in the right. But elsewhere, Jesus tells his disciples, Pay attention to yourselves.

If your brother sins, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him. That's a wonderful string of verbs, isn't it? If only it always worked like that.

Sin, not a wonderful verb, I suppose, to begin with, but anyway, sin met with rebuke rather than approval or encouragement. Rebuke met with repentance rather than resistance or stubbornness.

[5:04] Repentance met with forgiveness rather than lingering bitterness bitterness and vindictiveness. Sin, rebuke, repentance, forgiveness.

Exactly how it should go. Or I think of Paul's words in the pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus. It's an important part of faithful ministry to rebuke people.

Paul tells Timothy about dealing with sinful elders in 1 Timothy 5, verse 20. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all so that the rest may stand in fear.

Or in 2 Timothy chapter 4, Paul writes, Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. An elder must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

After some less than flattering comments about the Cretans, Paul says to Titus, This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.

[6:22] It is mostly, in the New Testament, I notice, the purview of the leader to do this, which makes me slightly nervous. But of course, Paul expects also the Colossians, for instance, in Colossians chapter 3, all of the Colossians, to admonish one another.

And it's a slightly different word, a little bit softer maybe. But it basically means to counsel about the avoidance or the cessation of an improper course of conduct.

Brother, don't go that way. Well, I think of that wonderful proverb in Proverbs chapter 27. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. Isn't that true? A faithful friend says the hard things that we need to hear. Risking the relationship for the greater good of their friend.

Like the merciful surgeon, digging in the knife, but to heal rather than to harm. While our enemies flatter us and then delight when we fall, you know, they stab us in the back.

[7:30] Our friends stab us in the front. Strangers walk on by. You know, they don't need the hassle of rebuking us. But the faithful friend somehow finds the courage to raise the subject that others won't and that they really don't want to raise, but feel that they need to try and protect their beloved friend from disaster.

And again, the Proverbs talk about receiving rebukes. A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool. One of my favorites is in the book of Psalms.

In Psalm 141, verse 5, King David writes, Let a righteous man strike me. It is a kindness. Let him rebuke me.

It is oil for my head. Let my head not refuse it. I don't know when he wrote that psalm, but, you know, I was wondering if he was thinking about the prophet Nathan when he wrote that.

[8:41] You are the man. What a powerful rebuke David once received from a righteous man. It must have been a crushing blow at the time like a sword through his heart.

A terrifying moment of guilt and shame I've been discovered that cut him very deeply. But it probably saved his life, didn't it?

What a kindness it is when a righteous man strikes you. Like oil that makes the face shine. It is a fitting rebuke from a godly person.

I wonder if you eagerly desire a rebuke from a righteous man like the psalmist. Do you understand the blessing that it is and what you would be missing out on if you needed such a thing but never got it?

Do you have a faithful friend? Well, of course, this is our subject for today because we're up to 2 Corinthians chapter 7, which is all about how Paul rebuked the Corinthians and how they responded.

[9:54] He did it by letter, which is always less than ideal, but that was the situation that he was in. And especially, I think it's important for us to understand the historical background here.

So I thought we might do a quick recap of the Corinthian timeline again. You might remember this from the very first talk in our series, or maybe you missed it, but I think it would probably do all of us some good to get a bit of a refresher.

So Paul's relationship with the Corinthians started in about 50 AD. He spent two years there preaching the gospel and establishing the church in this big, thriving port city in modern-day Greece.

Eventually, he returned to his home church in Syria, in Antioch in Syria, to give them an update on his missionary endeavors. Then he headed out again and made his way to Ephesus.

And Paul probably wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, or at least the first letter that we know about, in AD 54 from Ephesus. He mentions this letter in 1 Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 9, where he says, I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people.

[11:05] In other words, 1 Corinthians wasn't Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. It's just the first letter that has been preserved for us.

And that verse probably gives you a hint too that there were some serious problems in the church at Corinth in AD 54, including sexual immorality. Likewise, early on in AD 55, when Paul wrote the letter we call 1 Corinthians, there were still quite a lot of problems in the church.

In Corinth, Paul has to go through things like factionalism, sexual immorality, idolatry, problems with the Lord's Supper, problems in the way they were thinking about the resurrection, etc.

It sounds like it was a real mess. So then, Paul made a second visit to Corinth sometime in AD 55, which he describes as a painful visit in 2 Corinthians, chapter 2.

Because of something involving someone who wronged him. Now, we don't know exactly what happened. You know, these letters, it's like listening to one side of a phone conversation.

[12:13] You can't hear what the other person is saying. Sometimes you really like to know what the other person is saying. But I think we can trust God that we've been told what we need to hear. We don't know all the details that we might be curious about, but we know what we need to know for our salvation and godliness.

Whatever happened, the problem seems to have revolved around one man, someone who hurt Paul. Maybe he hurt Paul directly, or maybe Paul was trying to rebuke him, discipline him for sinning against someone else or something like that, and the Corinthians didn't back him up. Either way, somehow Paul got offside with the whole congregation or a large portion of the congregation in Corinth. And it turned him off, making a third visit because he thought it would be too painful.

So instead, he wrote a third letter, what he calls the severe letter or this letter that caused grief, which is the one that he's talking about in our passage today.

Okay? So we'll come to that in a moment. Titus was the courier of that letter. And having sent it out, Paul then left Ephesus, and we'll get the map up now if we can.

[13:30] Having written the letter and sent it out with Titus, Paul then left Ephesus and journeyed north into Troas and Macedonia on his way to Corinth, kind of around by land.

So he probably made it to Philippi or maybe Thessalonica before Titus arrives back with the good news. Okay? So that's what our passage is about this morning.

So pick it up in verse 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.

So this is how Paul felt coming into Macedonia. Weak, afflicted, in need of some rest, fighting without, probably persecution.

We know things in Thessalonica were rough for him last time. And fear within. Presumably he's talking about his anxiety over the Corinthians, how they would receive the letter.

[14:28] There's a lot of emotion in our passage this morning and at least the initial mood in verse 5, I've described it as restless concern. Paul is feeling weak, needing rest, fighting without and fear within.

Right? But in verse 6, everything turns around as it often does with a but God in verse 6. Paul says, 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 rejoice still more.

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. 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. So notice a couple of things in this little section. Number one, the significance of comfort. Arguably, the most important piece of vocabulary in the book.

[15 : 40] This is a book all about overflowing comfort. set against the backdrop of Isaiah 40-66. Isaiah promised that one day the people of God would be comforted in the sense of being saved and fully restored and established again in the new creation.

So Paul wants to remind the Corinthians again that God is the God of all comfort. God is the one who comforts the downcast. It's just who he is. It's typical of him.

But he doesn't just comfort people from on high, notice. I suppose he may do that, but specifically, Paul wants to talk here about how God comforts people through other people.

God brought comfort to Paul through Titus. And actually, Titus brought comfort to him because the Corinthians had comforted him. So you see this idea of overflowing comfort, cascading, multiplying, abundant comfort.

always coming ultimately from God, but going through others. This is what it means to be saved. It means you get caught up in this flood of abundant comfort.

[16 : 54] I'm sure, brothers and sisters, that many of us in this room can testify, can't we, to the amazing way that God has comforted us. He has rescued us from sin and death, perhaps from the depths of despair.

prayer. And he's set us back on our feet again. He's given us hope and peace and joy. That's exactly what happened to me as a young boy. I still remember it.

And then Paul says, let us not receive the grace of God in vain. We are to be comfort bringers to those around us. Our brothers and sisters in church, the people this morning sitting next to you need comfort.

Even over morning tea, how can you bring comfort to those around you? And then beyond us during the week, far and wide, how can we be walking billboards of God's comfort in our lives?

The same comfort which is on offer to every person we walk past. But secondly, notice how Paul basically in this passage prioritizes the long term over the short term.

[17 : 58] That's what this is all about, isn't it? In the short term, he calls them pain. And for a moment, he was really worried about that. You know, it's like when you hit send on an email or on a text or something like that.

And then he's just second guessing himself. He's worried about the letter. Maybe it was a bit too harsh. You know, did I have to tell them to emasculate themselves? How would it come across? Would the Corinthians receive it well? And then when he heard the good news from Titus, his momentary regret turned to rejoicing because, see, the end of verse 8, the letter grieved the Corinthians but only for a little while.

Soon in verse 9, their grief turned to repentance. Repentance leads to salvation. That was exactly what Paul was aiming for. Good news. Because momentary grief has brought them lasting salvation.

Now in verses 10 and 11, I think we come to the heart of the passage. Particularly verse 10. This sums up the whole thing. Paul says, For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

[19 : 15] So let's slow down and think about this verse for a second because I think this is the key to the passage and actually it helps us with some things we commonly misunderstand. First of all, notice that repentance is not the same thing as grief.

Repentance is not the same thing as grief or sorrow. So I think often people imagine that feeling really, really bad about your sins or feeling really, really sad about your sins is the same as repentance.

That's what God wants from us. You know, when Jesus commanded us to repent or when John the Baptist says repent or when Peter says repent or when Paul says repent in Acts chapter 17, people imagine that if they feel really, really bad about their sins, then that is what God requires of them.

That's what those commands are about. But it's not. And of course, the stakes are really high here because repentance leads to salvation, but grief doesn't necessarily.

necessarily. Think about how Peter distinguishes between the two in Acts chapter 2. When he finishes his gospel presentation, Luke says that the Jews were cut to the heart.

[20 : 31] In other words, they felt the sting of his message very sharply, didn't they? And so they said to Peter, what should we do? And do you remember what he said? Repent. You see, they hadn't repented yet even though they'd been cut to the heart.

And so again, you might feel really, really bad about your sins this morning. Maybe that's even why you came to church. But that doesn't necessarily mean you have repented and you will be saved. No, you've got to repent, not just grieve. And actually, you can grieve without repenting and actually you can repent without grieving. They're different things, often closely related but not necessarily. Grief is about feeling a deep sense of sorrow and sadness. Repentance is about changing. Changing your mind and then your whole life to turn away from one thing and towards another. You might feel absolutely cut up and devastated by something terrible that you've done. You might feel guilty, feel ashamed. You still might not repent. You might not change.

[21 : 44] Likewise, sometimes people change, don't they, but motivated by hope or excitement or love. You might think to yourself, oh, actually, I discovered that there's a better way of living.

I really want, you know, golf to be a bigger part of my life. Right? And so, you make sure that it is. That's repentance without grief. Now, in the Christian life, I think, in a sense, repentance will always kind of have some element of grief to it, some recognition of our sins that prompts us to repent, which I think is why we blur these lines or these two ideas in our heads.

But do you see how they are fundamentally different? And in some places, they can be completely separate and distinct. What Jesus is commanding of us is not grief, but repentance, change.

If you feel really bad about your sins, but have not changed, you are not going to be saved. And it's not just about changing once, either.

You know, the day you become a Christian. I have been thinking a little bit about Lutheran doctrine lately, as some of you may know. And of course, we're coming up to Reformation Sunday, celebrating the day, Luther posted the 95 Theses on the door of the Church at Wittenberg.

[23 : 03] So have a listen to Thesis number one. This is the sentence that sparked off the whole Reformation. Number one. Number one. I don't know if it will be up on the screen, actually.

But it's not about justification by faith just yet. It's not about, I don't know. Think about this. This is his first thesis that he wants to discuss. When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said, repent, he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

Number two. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance. That is, confession and satisfaction as administered by the clergy.

Number three. Yet it does not mean solely inner repentance. Such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortification of the flesh.

Right? Absolutely. He absolutely nails it to the door of the church at Vindberg. See, that's what we're talking about, friends. Repentance is how the Christian life starts and how it must continue.

[24 : 18] And it's not just about grief or then, as Luther puts it, changing yourself inwardly. Right? You might grieve, you might change your mind in a sense, in a kind of theoretical way, but it must lead to total life transformation for it to be called real repentance, true repentance.

Turning around, setting a new course, living completely differently. If that's not how you're living, you haven't repented, you aren't repenting, you won't be saved.

So then secondly, still in verses 10 and 11, notice how Paul distinguishes between godly grief and worldly grief. And it's not by how people feel, it's by what they do.

Right? Or what they produce. Judas felt a lot of pain over his sin. Or think back to King Saul and his disobedience.

How he tore the robe of Samuel as he turned away. Saul said to Samuel, I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the Lord.

[25 : 37] And Samuel said to Saul, I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the Lord and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel. As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe and it tore.

Samuel said to him, The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours who is better than you. And also, the glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for

he is not a man that he should have regret.

Saul sounds pretty grief-stricken in this passage, doesn't he? He begs for forgiveness in this passage. But because he didn't repent, he wasn't forgiven.

And in fact, in the following chapters, all we see is Saul spiraling down deeper and deeper into wickedness, don't we? Growing in his hatred and jealousy of David, his paranoia, his cruelty, he murders the priest at Nob, he visits the witch at Endor.

Worldly grief doesn't lead to repentance, doesn't lead to salvation and life. Worldly grief leads to death. Instead of saving people from sin, it only hardens them in it.

[26 : 48] It turns us, it turns into bitterness and resentment, hopelessness, wallowing, blaming others so that you don't look so bad, hating the person who rebuked you.

Whereas godly grief produces repentance, leads to salvation without regret. And Paul has a really helpful description of repentance, verse 11, I think he just put some flesh on the bones for us.

If you want to know what repentance really is or what it feels like in a sense, he says, foresee what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment.

At every point, you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. So there are seven words here Paul uses to try and capture genuine repentance. I don't think the point is quite to dissect them all, but it's a bit like an impressionist painting.

You have these vivid brush strokes. Repentance is about speed. The first word, earnestness, is prominent at the head of the list and it has to do with being quick or swift or in a hurry.

[27 : 58] You know, the Corinthians acted with haste to try and rectify the situation. They didn't just put it on the back burner. Real repentance means that dealing with your sin goes straight to the top of your to-do list rather than, oh yeah, you know, I have every intention of sorting that out one day.

The second thing, as strange as it may sound, is defensiveness. Although I don't mean that in a negative way. We usually use that word negatively, but Paul's second word in the list is about defending your actions.

Apologia is the word. You know, sometimes we talk about apologetics, defending the faith. I think what he means here is that the Corinthians very quickly tried to explain themselves. The Corinthians probably hadn't quite realized how serious the matter was until Paul wrote his severe letter to them.

So obviously, he's commending them. He's not saying you were making excuses or you were being stubborn or something. But I imagine they were trying to say something like, oh, we're so sorry. We didn't quite realize what we were doing or how much we would hurt you or whatever it was.

We can see that we did the wrong thing, but it wasn't our intention. The Old Testament distinguishes between sins of a high hand, you know, sins of kind of flagrant rebellion and then unintentional sins.

[29 : 20] We all stumble and sin in many ways. And I'm sorry, you know, there's a difference between trying to overthrow the government versus just accidentally breaking the law or even intentionally breaking laws and then repenting, but never wanting to, you weren't exactly wanting to tear down the whole system, right?

We of all, when you become a Christian, you fundamentally turn away from rebellion. But we still stumble and sin in many ways, don't we? We want to live under Jesus' rule, but we don't always do so perfectly. There's a bit of color and nuance to the way that we sin.

In the same way, I think the Corinthians were eager to defend themselves in that sort of way which Paul commends. We didn't realize. Please forgive us. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the Corinthians wanted to set things right.

The last thing on the list, what punishment? It's a different word to the one used back in chapter 2, verse 6, but I think Paul's talking about the same thing. The punishment the Corinthians inflicted on the man who did the wrong.

It's about justice. You know, like the 12-step programs? You know, you've got to reach, I don't know what step it is, but you've got to make restitution. You try and fix things that you have broken.

[30 : 32] Real repentance looks like that. As much as you are able to, you go around and you try and make things right. So Paul says, 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.

Notice this is where Paul clarifies his whole purpose in writing the severe letter. And I think it clarifies a major theme in 2 Corinthians as well. That Paul is not primarily concerned about the man who wronged him or about himself.

I think he's probably talking about himself in a roundabout way, that he's the one who suffered the wrong. But he's not really writing to try and defend himself. Or as he says throughout this letter in 2 Corinthians, he's not writing to commend himself.

His aim actually all along is to help the Corinthians to reveal something to them. And here, as he puts it, it's their earnestness for Paul. And that's important because Paul is the servant of the great servant, the Lord Jesus.

Paul is an ambassador of God himself. So how the Corinthians relate to him and treat him has a direct bearing on their relationship to God, just as it does for us. You can't shoot the messenger and expect to be welcomed in by the one who sent him.

[31 : 55] So Paul really, this whole time, wants to bring the Corinthians back into a good relationship, not just with himself, but with God. And so finally, in verse 13 to 16, Paul comes full circle, as it were, because it has worked.

Therefore, we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoice still more at the joy of Titus because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. It sounds like maybe Titus was a bit nervous himself about carrying the letter to the Corinthians.

But, you know, Paul maybe said to him something to encourage him. No, no, don't worry. The Corinthians will, you know, I'm sure they'll respond well. I'm sure they'll receive it well.

The Corinthians will welcome you. And in a sense, I think Paul only half believed what he was, you know, telling Titus. Do you know what I mean? He's giving the Corinthians the benefit of the doubt and then he's sort of hoping that they will live up to his charitable assumptions and his boast about them.

And they did. So all of Paul's boasting proved true. Titus was refreshed. Paul's confidence in the Corinthians was well-deserved and has now been strengthened all the more.

[33 : 08] I have complete confidence in you. So, as we wrap up, I think this is a good place to reflect on application. The joy of gospel ministry is seen in people repenting and coming to salvation.

Not just in terms of initial conversions, but throughout their lives. As God leads us up to glory, it's wonderful to see people becoming more and more like Jesus.

The pain of gospel ministry is sometimes in having the courage to rebuke people and bringing up the awkward things, facing conflict when we'd rather just go away and hide.

But even more than that, it's so painful when you try to do good to someone, when you try to be a friend, but you're taken as an enemy. And people stubbornly refuse to change.

So, do we want to be a church where rebukes, sometimes gentle, sometimes sharp, as needed, are welcomed and embraced?

[34 : 17] Like David says in the psalm we read earlier. Wouldn't it be a great compliment to us if someone boasted about us? I don't know if anyone's talking about SLBC. It doesn't matter too much, but wouldn't it be a great compliment to us if someone boasted about us?

Oh, the way Paul boasts about the Corinthians here. When people said, oh, I love those people at St. Lucia Bible Church. No, they really want to know what the scriptures say, what the godly life looks like.

They really appreciate people pointing out their sins and flaws and mistakes because they want to be more godly. They want to be obedient. Too often, I think, churches and relationships don't survive people saying hard things.

Either because no one ever says anything too hard or controversial out of fear or because as soon as something is said, people leave. You know, we've all got cars.

We can go to any number of churches around us. So it's just easier to leave. Now, at this point, I thought it might be a good test, practice to mildly correct you.

[35 : 37] I'm quite nervous about saying this even though it is the tiniest of things. I wanted to mention the connection card system. For the most part, it's working wonderfully.

I get, I don't know how many I get, 60, 80, from this congregation, from Uni Church as well. We get an enormous number of prayer points. It's delight, it's one of the best things of my week to read the wonderful things you are learning, thinking about, you know, hearing about your evangelistic efforts,

hearing about your just efforts to grow in godliness.

I really appreciate it. It's wonderful. But I think I have got one or two anonymous connection cards that were just a bit gripey or passive-aggressive.

This is not for more than one or two people in the congregation. Please don't do that if you're here. Not for my sake, but for you.

It's not godly. It's not helpful. If you've got some criticism or some feedback, put your name on it, stand behind it, give it to me.

[37:01] I hope that you will find I'm appreciative. I won't hold it against you. I might not always agree with you, I don't know, but it's totally fine with me that you might have suggestions or even hard things to say to me.

It takes courage to be that loving friend, I know, but I think it's kind of cowardly to be whinging anonymously.

And I think our society has become increasingly cowardly in this regard. We should stand out from the rest of them. Which brings me to my last point this morning.

I think that at least one of the reasons for that is that as our society de-Christianizes, they have nothing to do with their guilt and grief and shame. For some, like Judas, they will feel crushed by their guilt.

For others, they might try to minimize it. Still others, I think, because many religions promote this approach, they try to cover up their bad deeds with good ones. Which is kind of like trying to douse feces in perfume.

[38:14] increasingly, our society is judgmental rather than forgiving, litigious, rather than compassionate and cooperative. They have no real basis for their morality or ethics, except their own emotional preferences, but they feel increasingly convinced that they are right.

But in here, we can be different. And we should be salt and light out there. Godly grief comes from knowing the gospel, knowing that there is something we can do without guilt and shame.

It's okay if someone rebukes you, isn't it? You knew that you were a sinner, didn't you? I mean, again, when it comes to feedback, my mother always said to me, if someone rebukes you and you feel misunderstood, you know, like someone says something and you feel like that doesn't quite hit the mark, just remember, there are heaps of worse things that they don't know about, hiding, so thank God they didn't put their finger on it.

He who knew no sin became sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. My sins don't stick to me anymore.

I am righteous in Christ. The blood of Jesus separates me from my sin as far as the east is from the west. And you know, at the end here, as Paul shows very often, the fear that conflict and rebuke and so on will cost us the relationship, will destroy the relationship, turns out to be precisely wrong.

[39:59] Among godly people. And when the godly person realizes that the person who has pointed out their sin, the person who has rebuked them, that person is my friend.

See, that's how challenging conversations, difficult conflict, brings people together and makes relationships stronger and gives us more confidence in each other and in our gospel partnership together than we had before.

So let's pray. loving father god, help us to be a church like the corinthians in this regard, to be ready to receive rebukes, to gently or sometimes sharply rebuke each other, to help each other stick on the straight and narrow path, rather than wandering astray.

We pray that you'd help us to be true friends to each other, that we might have lots of friends around us in our growth groups, just friends that we connect with over morning tea, who talk about the gospel with us, remind us what Christ like living looks like, help us when we've wandered and we pray father that we would receive these things well, that we would be eager to repent and change, thinking of David and his desire to receive rebukes from the righteous.

Thank you that we get to be included among this precious community of the saints, and we pray that more and more we would grow together and be worthy of that title.

[41:41] We pray in Jesus name. Amen.