

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter Two

Introduction

There was a Christian in Corinth who was openly living in the sexual sin of incest. The congregation tolerated his sin until the apostle Paul convinced them that they had a responsibility to confront the man. They *did* confront him and his initial refusal to repent resulted in him being put out of the fellowship.

The man eventually responded to the discipline of the church by repenting of his sin! Now what?

The answer seems simple enough: *Forgive him!* But apparently the believers were having difficulty doing so, because Paul writes,

2 Corinthians 2:7 ...on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.

“You **ought** rather to forgive and comfort him” indicates that they were **not** forgiving and comforting him! They ought to, and that is what these verses are about.

Forgive and comfort; then verse eight says, “reaffirm your love.” In other words, the one who has repented of sin should be forgiven and then restored to the fellowship.

The Christians at Corinth were falling short in the process of restoration. Christians in churches can still fall short in the process of restoration. We want to understand the teaching of the apostle Paul so that we do not fall short in restoring those who have repented.

We’ll organize our thoughts around three points: Restoring Your Brother To Fellowship #1 Divulges The Fullness Of Forgiveness, #2 Defeats The Failure Of Forgiveness, and #3 Diffuses The Fragrance Of Forgiveness.

#1 Restoring Your Brother To Fellowship Divulges The Fullness Of Forgiveness (v1-4)

Scholars disagree on some of the details of the disciplining of this man in Corinth. Here is one likely scenario. Paul had urged the congregation to discipline the man when he wrote First Corinthians. But the man committing incest was not expelled from the Corinthian congregation, so Paul made a second visit to Corinth. There the man assaulted him verbally by challenging his apostolic authority to exercise discipline in the Corinthian church. Paul was deeply hurt and, unable to solve the dilemma, returned to Ephesus. Upon his arrival in Ephesus, Paul wrote such a severe letter that the Corinthians could have turned completely away from him. Titus probably delivered the letter to the church in Corinth. On the basis of this letter and the influence of Titus, the congregation changed its attitude, took action, and disciplined the unrepentant man.

In the meantime, Paul had traveled from Ephesus to Macedonia, where he anxiously waited for Titus to tell him about the effect of the severe letter (7:5-16). Titus informed him that the Corinthians had disciplined the man, who as a result had repented. Paul expressed both relief and joy that the critical situation in the Corinthians church had passed. He now encouraged the congregation to forgive the repentant sinner and to restore him.

Paul describes this second, sorrowful visit and the subsequent letter he wrote:

2 Corinthians 2:1 But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.

2 Corinthians 2:2 For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

2 Corinthians 2:3 And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is *the joy* of you all.

You get a sense in these verses that Paul was acting out of love for the Corinthians when he made his sorrowful visit and when he wrote to them. Urging them to discipline the man living in sin was not a cold, formal, legal process. It broke Paul's heart. Nevertheless it had to be done.

Church discipline is a tough subject. Churches tend to go to extremes: Some *refuse* to exercise discipline, and some *abuse* their exercise of discipline. Among the churches that do exercise discipline there are those who carry it out in an informal way, and those who are extremely formal.

We talked about church discipline in First Corinthians chapter five. Our subject today is restoration *after* discipline. If discipline flows from a broken heart of love, so must restoration:

2 Corinthians 2:4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

Paul's heart was afflicted with anguish. He wept over them. He loved them abundantly. When he urged them to exercise church discipline it was because he loved them, and because he loved the man living in sin. Thus it wasn't to get rid of the man, but to see him repent and be restored.

Church discipline always has as its goal the repentance and restoration of the one who is living in sin. Churches and Christians who keep this goal in mind express to the sinner, to the congregation, and to the watching world, that they love one another too much to allow someone to ruin their life. They're not trying to get rid of the sinner; their trying to rid him or her of their sin.

When you understand that the goal is repentance and restoration you see the fullness of forgiveness. The repentant sinner is fully forgiven; he or she is restored to the full privileges of fellowship.

This is also precisely where we can fail. It can be tough to recognize repentance and, therefore, we withhold full forgiveness. We put conditions and limits on the returning sinner. Paul addresses this in verses five through eleven.

#2 Restoring Your Brother To Fellowship
Defeats The Failure Of Forgiveness
(v5-11)

When I say “the failure of forgiveness,” I am referring to our failure to fully forgive. God’s forgiveness of sin is full; but ours is often partial.

The Corinthians are a good, bad example:

2 Corinthians 2:5 But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe.

The indication here is that they *were* being “too severe.” They were refusing to restore the repentant sinner; they were failing to fully forgive.

2 Corinthians 2:6 This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man,

The word “majority” lets you know that this was an official process of church discipline involving the majority of the congregation. The “punishment” of the man being excluded from the privileges of fellowship was “sufficient” to bring him to repentance.

2 Corinthians 2:7 so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.

“Swallowed up with too much sorrow” lets you know that this man was truly sorrowful, truly repentant. He was broken and humbled; he had turned away from his sin.

Sometimes we want to forgive before a person has truly repented. But sometimes we won’t forgive even though a person has truly repented! Repentance can be tough to call. For sure, the person must forsake the sin and turn away from it. Having done so, it is not up to us to judge whether they have cried enough, or are showing enough sorrow.

2 Corinthians 2:8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him.

2 Corinthians 2:9 For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

You “reaffirm your love” as an act of “obedience.” Love is commanded; it is an act of your will. It is not a feeling. You decide to love or not. Restoring a repentant sinner is a “test” of your obedience.

2 Corinthians 2:10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive*. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ,

Please note the generosity of Paul's forgiveness. This man had sinned against the congregation, but he had also sinned personally against Paul. The congregation had forgiven the man; that was good enough for Paul. Paul wasn't withholding his forgiveness until the man personally came to him and repented by using just the right words. If the man had truly repented – as the congregation had reported – that was good enough for Paul to be fully restored to fellowship with him. Vice-versa: If Paul forgave someone, then the Corinthians should respect him and extend their forgiveness.

This kind of forgiveness is made possible because Christians, no matter where they are geographically, are spiritually “in the presence of Christ.” Jesus gave the church the authority on earth to declare to people whether or not their sins are forgiven. Christians **do not** have the power to forgive sins; only God can forgive sins. But you do have the authority to tell someone they have been forgiven or not forgiven.

Whenever you share the Gospel, that is what you are doing: You are declaring with authority that if a person receives Jesus, their sins will be forgiven. If they reject Jesus, you are declaring with authority that their sins are not forgiven.

Back to the subject of restoration: If you do not fully restore the repentant sinner, you fail in your forgiveness:

2 Corinthians 2:11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Simply put, when you fall short in restoring a repentant sinner, Satan moves in and “takes advantage of us.” The phrase means he establishes a base of operations in our midst. He sets up a field office in the church! From there he wreaks havoc in the lives and testimony of the believers. Satan will devise all kinds of strategies to keep you from restoring someone – knowing that if he can undermine forgiveness, he can undermine the power of the Gospel to change and affect lives.

Don't give Satan this base of operations! Choose to forgive, regardless your feelings. Fully forgive; restore to full fellowship and forgiveness will not fail.

#3 Restoring Your Brother To Fellowship Diffuses The Fragrance Of Forgiveness (v12-17)

The picture in these remaining is that of the "Roman Triumph," the special tribute that Rome gave to their conquering generals. It was their equivalent of the American "ticker-tape parade."

2 Corinthians 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord,

2 Corinthians 2:13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

If a commander in chief won a complete victory over the enemy on foreign soil, and if he killed at least 5,000 enemy soldiers and gained new territory for the Emperor, then that commander in chief was entitled to a Roman Triumph. The processional would include the commander riding in a golden chariot, surrounded by his officers. The parade would also include a display of the spoils of battle, as well as the captive enemy soldiers. The Roman priests would also be in the parade, carrying burning incense to pay tribute to the victorious army.

The procession would follow a special route through the city and would end at the Circus Maximus where the helpless captives would entertain the people by fighting wild beasts.

How does this piece of history apply to you today? Jesus Christ, your great Commander in chief, came to foreign soil (this earth) and completely defeated the enemy (Satan). Instead of killing 5,000, He gave life to more than 5,000 - to 3,000 plus at Pentecost and to another 2,000 plus shortly after Pentecost. Jesus Christ claimed the spoils - lost souls who had been in bondage to sin and Satan.

As I mentioned, the priests followed the victorious general followed and burned incense. The fragrance of that incense diffused throughout the crowds. If you were a citizen of Rome, the fragrance was a sweet fragrance of victory. But if you were a prisoner, it was the awful aroma of your coming death.

You and I are compared to priests in the New Testament. In fact, the Bible says we are a “kingdom of priest.” Your testimony of Jesus, and your sharing of the Gospel, “diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” Wherever Christians go with the fragrance of Jesus, some receive the Lord and are saved, while some reject the Lord and remain lost in their sins:

1. To those who reject the Lord, the Gospel is an aroma that should warn them of their second death – their eternal separation from God in their sins.
2. To those who receive the Lord, the Gospel is an aroma that fills them with new life as it promises the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

2 Corinthians 2:16 ... And who *is* sufficient for these things?

2 Corinthians 2:17 For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

“Peddling” is a word that is used of someone offering fraudulent merchandise. It was used of con artists. The Gospel is not a fraudulent offer being made by con artists. It is the genuine promise of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. You and I have been given the authority to make that promise to people. Their response to the Gospel determines the effectiveness of the promise. As you read in First Timothy 4:10,

1 Timothy 4:10 ... [Jesus] is *the* Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

Here is a contemporary way of putting this: **You smell!** Whether you smell *sweet*, or whether you *stink*, is ultimately up to the person sniffing you. You should diffuse the fragrance of forgiveness. Not everyone will receive it: They must first admit that they are sinners and repent. But some *will* receive it.

Conclusion

In light of Paul’s illustration, the question we should ask of ourselves is this: Do we diffuse the fragrance of forgiveness? Certainly we do in the sharing of the Gospel with unbelievers.

But what about among believers? Is there a sweet aroma of forgiveness in our midst? Can a repentant sinner really be restored to full fellowship in our midst?

It's a question we will answer every time the situation presents itself. Let's be certain we fully forgive the repentant sinner; let's be certain we restore that person to the full privileges of fellowship with Jesus Christ in His church on earth.

Anything less will make our church a field office for Satan.