

## Giving Forgiveness

**Printed Text:** 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:2-15

**Background Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:2-15

**Devotional Reading:** Matthew 18:21-35

### 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

<sup>5</sup> *If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely.* <sup>6</sup> *The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient.* <sup>7</sup> *Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.* <sup>8</sup> *I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.* <sup>9</sup> *Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.* <sup>10</sup> *Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake,* <sup>11</sup> *in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.*

### 2 Corinthians 7:2-15

<sup>2</sup> *Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one.* <sup>3</sup> *I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you.* <sup>4</sup> *I have spoken to you with great frankness; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.*

<sup>5</sup> *For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within.* <sup>6</sup> *But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,* <sup>7</sup> *and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.*

<sup>8</sup> *Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—<sup>9</sup> yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.* <sup>10</sup> *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.* <sup>11</sup> *See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.* <sup>12</sup> *So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are.* <sup>13</sup> *By all this we are encouraged.*

*In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you.* <sup>14</sup> *I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well.* <sup>15</sup> *And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling.*

### Lesson Background

From an earlier lesson, we know that Paul founded the church at Corinth as noted in Acts 18:1-18. A few years later, Paul spent a significant amount of time in Ephesus. While there he received a letter from the Corinthians asking for guidance on several difficult issues (1 Corinthians 1:11; 7:1). He responded by

sending the letter of 1 Corinthians and also by sending Timothy to assist the struggling church (4:17; 16:5- 11).

But these remedies apparently were unsuccessful. After Timothy returned with the bad news, Paul paid them a visit "in heaviness" (2 Corinthians 2:1). This was an unpleasant experience, as Paul apparently had to confront a number of individuals. Paul also suffered slanderous accusations (2 Corinthians 10, 11, 12:11).

After he returned to Ephesus, Paul sent Titus to supervise the situation. Upon hearing no report, he began to worry and decided to return to Corinth. On the way, however, he met Titus coming back to Ephesus over land through Macedonia (Acts 20:1, 2; 2 Corinthians 7:5-7). Paul was generally pleased with Titus' report, but some issues still needed to be addressed. He therefore sent the letter of 2 Corinthians to prepare the church for his impending return (2 Corinthians 13:1).

### **Today's Aim**

- **Facts:** to examine passages from 2 Corinthians that deal with forgiveness and restoration of damaged relationships.
- **Principle:** to teach the importance of forgiving and restoring relationships between Christians.
- **Application:** to encourage Christians to make the decision to forgive and to make the effort to restore relationships.

### **Merciful Judgment (2 Corinthians 2:5- 11)**

#### **Sufficient Suffering (vs. 5,6)**

It is noted, Paul may have written other letters to the Corinthians: one before 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:9) and one between the first and second epistles, often called the sever letter (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:3,4) however, these letters did not survive.

#### ***1. How many letters did Paul write to the church in Corinth?***

While in Ephesus, Paul received word that a member of the church in Corinth was having an affair with his stepmother. Paul recognized that the sin involved demanded that this man be barred from the fellowship until he repented (1 Corinthians 5). The Corinthians were tolerating something that should not be tolerated.

In the text before us, we see the opposite extreme. Apparently, the Corinthians refuse to forgive a certain man even after he confesses his sin. (This may or may not be the same man in 1 Corinthians 5.) "To some extent," Paul says, "what this individual said or did grieved all of us, not just me." This sets the tone for the remainder of Paul's remarks.

#### ***2a. What offense caused all the "grief" at the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:5,6)?***

#### **Confirming Love (v. 7, 8)**

There are two goals to the extreme action of dis-fellowshipping. One goal is to protect the church's doctrinal and moral purity. The other goal is to bring about the repentance of the wayward believer. The church is not empowered to punish those who are outside the church; God himself will hand out their punishments in the next life.

The church, instead, is to discipline the backslider who is within the church (1 Corinthians 5:12, 13). A person may be overwhelmed with sorrow and grief as a consequence. But if the final result is the person's

restoration to a relationship with Christ, then the best possible outcome has been achieved! Godly sorrow leads to repentance.

Even though this man has caused considerable grief, "love" must still be the guiding force, not anger and vindictiveness (v. 8). Paul had reminded the Corinthians in his first letter that love "*suffers long, and is kind*" (1 Corinthians 13:4). He now urges them to put this principle into action. Church discipline should have a redemptive purpose (Luke 17:3, 4; 2 Thessalonians 3:14, 15; James 5:19, 20).

### ***2b. What should be our guiding force in correcting a believer (vs. 7-10)?***

There is a subtle warning behind verse 9. Paul says that he has written as a test of their loyalty to his teaching. Obviously, if they fail to recognize his authority in such matters, then their obedience will again be called into question. As he says in 2 Corinthians 13:1-3, they need to be ready to answer for their actions when he comes on a third visit.

True repentance before Christ brings true forgiveness from Christ (1 John 1:9). The man in question probably has already received Christ's forgiveness based on what Paul has just said in verses 7, 8. Will the Corinthians have the mind of Christ by forgiving that man as well?

### ***3. Should the church hold anything against a believer if he or she repented (vs. 9,10)?***

We (believers) must understand that an unwillingness to forgive is not a characteristic of God because God is love and He is a forgiving God. In the book of Matthew, Ch. 18, vs. 21-35, instructions on forgiving are given. It uses the illustration of a king who was owed debts from his servants. One particular servant could not pay his debt and asked for mercy, which the king granted. However, this same servant did not extend mercy to his fellow man who owed him and he threw the man in prison. When the king heard about this unkind act, he asked the servant, why he didn't show pity upon his debtor as the he (king) did for him? The king was angry and delivered the servant to the tortures. In the end verse, v. 35, it reads, "*So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.*" A lack of forgiveness is offensive not only to fellow believers but most of all to God. If we can't forgive our brother or sister of their trespasses, God will not forgive us of our trespasses which is what Satan wants. If we are not forgiven, we do not have a fellowship with the Father and if there is no fellowship, we will not gain eternal life but eternal damnation.

Paul knew it was time for the Corinthians, the repentant offender and himself to restore their fellowship and not allow the incident to become an opportunity for Satan to drive a wedge between him and the church. It was important to grant forgiveness so that the man's joy would be restored. Paul also knew there was and is no place in the church for man-made limits on God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness toward repentant sinners. Such restrictions could only rob the fellowship of the joy of unity.

### ***4. How can Satan use an unwillingness to forgive to his advantage and our harm (v. 11)?***

#### **Paul's Comfort (2 Corinthians 7:2-7)**

#### **Self-Defense (vs. 2, 3)**

When Paul returned to Corinth earlier, he apparently had been accused of misleading and exploiting the church (see 2 Corinthians 10:1-11). Paul thus sets an example of forgiveness by implying that he harbors no hard feelings in this regard. His motives and actions are always pure. Specifically, Paul never treated anyone disrespectfully, never said anything to encourage moral corruption, and never told the Corinthians what they wanted to hear just to get money (see 1 Corinthians 9:1-12). His actions were always honorable, thus the church is responsible for any hard feelings that ever passed between them. Although

Paul is not responsible for the conflict, he does not lord it over the Corinthians. Even when he uses strong words, Paul's goal is not to "condemn" (v. 3 of today's lesson). Instead, he always acts in their best interests. He models the type of loving forgiveness that he now asks them to demonstrate.

Paul begins to review the recent situation. After his confrontational visit, Paul was forced to return quickly to Ephesus to attend to pressing concerns. He therefore sent his disciple Titus to manage the situation in Corinth. The volatility of the situation left Paul plagued with doubts.

#### ***5. Why did Paul send Titus to Corinth (v. 5)?***

During this time, Paul was experiencing inner turmoil over the prospect of what lay ahead and God came to his rescue. It is the Lord who comforts us in our times of distress. Sometimes He does this through an inner peace that comes to us in the midst of a storm. At other times though, God uses people to bring us comfort. This He did for Paul through the arrival of his coworker Titus. It was not just the sight of Titus that encouraged Paul; it was also the news that he brought. Paul was encouraged by the manner in which the Corinthians comforted Titus, since he brought them such a confrontational letter. Paul was also encouraged by their response to himself, which was manifested in 3 ways: 1 - "earnest desire" - they longed to see Paul again and resume their relationship with him; 2 - "mourning" - they were sorrowful over their sin and the breach it created between themselves and Paul; and 3 - "zeal" - they loved Paul to such a degree that they were willing to defend him against those who sought to harm him, specifically the false teachers.

#### ***6. How did the coming of Titus encourage the Apostle Paul? (vs. 6,7)***

Paul did not regret sending the letter, even though it caused them sorrow, because he knew that sorrow over their sin would affect in them repentance leading to obedience. Yet Paul did regret having sent it for a brief time while awaiting Titus' return, fearing that his letter was too harsh, and that he might have driven them further away from him. In the end, however, he rejoiced because the letter accomplished what he had hoped. The letter produced a sorrow in the Corinthian believers that led them to repent of their sins.

#### ***7. Did Paul regret sending the severe letter to Corinth? (vs. 8-9)***

"Godly" sorrow" refers to sorrow that is according to the will of God and produced by the Holy Spirit. True repentance cannot occur apart from such a genuine sorrow over one's sins. In verse 10, Paul was saying that repentance, (turning away from and restoring one's relationship to God), belongs to the realm or sphere of salvation. Repentance is at the very heart of and proves one's salvation: unbelievers repent of their sin initially when they are saved, and then as believers, repent of their sins continually to keep the joy and blessing of their relationship to God.

#### ***8. What is godly sorrow? What is repentance? (v. 10)***

Not only was Paul rejoicing about what he had heard from Titus' visit to the Corinthians, but Titus was blessed as well. He was well received by the church which convinced Paul of their willing obedience to his directives and engendered in Titus an affection and appreciation for them. Titus' genuine love for the people no doubt assisted in the healing process for Paul and the Corinthians.

#### ***9. How did Titus feel about the Corinthians after his visit? (v. 15)***

#### ***10. Is it possible for us to be forgiven if we are not forgiving?***

## **CONCLUSION**

Paul had experienced a relationship meltdown in Corinth. An individual there had fallen out of fellowship with God and the Corinthian believers. The church had disciplined the offender. Paul wrote to advocate for this person and to urge the church to forgive and restore. Paul wanted reconciliation and was overjoyed when it happened. We are all vulnerable in the area of relationships. We all need to be forgiven and to be forgiving. Paul was most gracious to those who had hurt him and the church. Are we willing to extend that same graciousness to those who have offended us?

## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, thank you for being so merciful and gracious. Thank you, Lord, God for forgiving us of our trespasses. Teach us thy ways oh Lord, so that we may be forgiving of our brother or sister that they may reconcile themselves back into the inherited kingdom of God. Amen.

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

If you can't forgive, how can you be forgiven? (see Matthew 6:14,15)