

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 How to Restore Fellowship Falls Ch. AM 10/13/2024

How do we restore a troubled marriage, a rift across a clan, a dispute in a school, a neighborhood? How do we make the pain and grief stop? Not by pointing out as many sins as we can, but by forgiving in love as many sins as we can.

Corinth was called sin city – yet God built a holy church in that city, a church with a unified fellowship. Sin had broken fellowship. In our passage, we have instructions for how to restore fellowship with Paul and with each other.

Because the risen Lord Jesus is present in the church by His Spirit, we are shown how to restore our fellowship with Christ and with each other.

Failure to forgive had put the church out of step with our gracious Savior.

1. Forgiving, comforting, and loving those who caused us grief. (v.5-8)

Verse 5, *“Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure - not to put it too severely – to all of you.”*

There was a certain man in the church whose sin had caused pain and grief to everyone. Even the Holy Spirit is grieved when sin disrupts the fellowship, so it makes sense that believers filled with the Spirit would be grieved also.

Church discipline in Corinth was to be done in that context - church-wide grief about the sin of that person. Verse 6, *“For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough,”*

The leadership of the church in Corinth had brought the sin of one man before the church. The word here was majority, not everybody. This word “majority” showed us that a smaller number of people still disagreed.

Paul’s point in verse 6 was that the majority agreed-upon action of discipline was enough, and so it was now fulfilled, and Paul wrote in verse 6 that the action was enough for the person to repent. In that situation, Paul gave his instruction in verse 7. Verse 7, *“...so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”*

Paul’s instruction was that since the man had received discipline and Paul had shown genuine repentance, that the church ought to forgive, comfort and restore him to their fellowship. The goal of church discipline was achieved - to restore the sinning person.

If the church failed to respond to the repentant man with forgiving and comforting, then that man may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. The word “*overwhelmed*” here was the same word that Peter used in 1 Peter 5:8 to describe Satan overwhelming people like a lion devouring people! Our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to overwhelm or devour! The word means to completely overpower, or to swallow up. The writer to the Hebrews

used this same word in Hebrews 11:29 to refer to the Egyptians being engulfed and drown by the waters of the Red Sea. Here in our passage in verse 7, the verb was used to describe a person's spiritual state – that the person may be drowning in despair. The person under discipline could, despite his repentance, drown spiritually with the false conclusion that God does not love him, and that the church does not love him, and that there was no forgiveness for him!

Paul made an important distinction here, between a) being sorrowful and b) being overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Being sorrowful for sin is good, and it is a necessary part of repentance. But being engulfed with sorrow that completely overpowers him was not what Christ died and rose again to give to sinners!

Applying church discipline can be illustrated with bowling. Go too far to the left and have a gutter ball to the left, or go too far to the right and have a gutter ball to the right. Too little or too much church discipline! How can the church bowl a strike? Paul gives verse 8, *“So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.”* To reaffirm was a verb that meant to decide in favor of the man. Love is a decision. Love is not simply an emotion, but a deliberate determination to act and speak toward the other person in a way that provides good for their spiritual walk with God.

How do we make a church fellowship's pain and grief stop? By bowling a strike of disciplining what is necessary, followed by forgiving and loving.

2. Passing the obedience test, in the presence of Christ. (v.9-10)

Verse 9, *“for this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.”*

The test was whether the church in Corinth was genuine in spiritual matters. They must be obedient in everything, not just in some things. Paul expected the church to comply in both taking the needed actions of discipline and in taking the needed actions of embracing the repentant person with sincere love.

Verse 10, *“Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ.”*

Paul himself joined in and identified with each of them in their extending forgiving words and actions. When Paul found a way to forgive and move beyond, the church must also take that same pathway to forgive and move beyond.

They can praise God that the act of discipline has had the God-appointed effect. The people were expected to reaffirm their love for him.

Why was it necessary for Paul to forgive him also? Paul was like the spiritual father of the church in Corinth, because Paul was the missionary who brought them to faith in Christ. In addition, Paul himself also had experienced a

lot of pain from this one man. Yet Paul himself held no grudges against the man. Paul was not nursing any resentments while waiting for an apology that would never come. Instead, Paul was emphasizing what Jesus emphasized. Paul reminded them of the presence of Christ in the church and the need for the cause of Christ to press forward in the church. The reminder of the presence of Christ brought in teachings of Christ, such as Matthew 12:30, “*Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.*” It was Jesus who always taught that a tone of animosity would divide believers and would scatter believers into splinter groups. When Jesus gave His disciples The Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6, the only element to the Lord’s Prayer that Jesus immediately referenced afterwards and expounded, was the idea of forgiveness. Listen to Matthew 6:14-15, “[v.12 *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*]...*For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their sins, neither will your Father forgive your sins.*”

So, here Paul emphasized Paul’s own forgiving of the man for the sake of the believers, and “*in the presence of Christ.*” This means that Paul’s forgiveness was genuine – that Paul’s forgiveness was seen by the all-seeing Christ. Hebrews 4:13, “*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to Whom we must give account.*”

Cleaning up the big mess of sin in a church fellowship must be done in a way that honors the Lord Jesus, the head of the church. Everything we do must reflect the manner in which Jesus has already graciously forgiven each of us. All official dealings with sin and unofficial dealings with sin must be done with the recognition that Jesus Himself is present with us in His church by His Spirit. Revelation 2:1, it is Jesus who, “*...walks among...the golden lampstands.*”

Paul was applying that to the church in Corinth that was in pain – they were to live their whole lives in the sight of Christ, who walks up and down the pews, and the aisles, and between the various huddles of people with coffee cups in the fellowship time. Godliness in a church and godliness in each individual was that as Jesus heard everything said by each of His people, Jesus would be honored, obeyed and followed. In the presence of Jesus, we are reminded of His nail-pierced hands, that Jesus paid the ultimate price to forgive us, and so we commanded to forgive others.

3. Knowing Satan’s strategies. (v.11)

Verse 11, “*...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*”

Holding onto grudges in Paul or holding onto grudges in the congregation would be quickly exploited by Satan to undermine the church's healthy fellowship. It was Jesus who taught in Luke 22:31, "*Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that He might sift you like wheat...*" Satan's desire is to cause divisions and keep them going. Satan's plan is to cause believers to harbor ill will toward a repentant sinner instead of showing love, mercy and grace. The devil hates forgiveness and Christian love. The devil's goal is to push people into weariness, despair and the dark path of despondency.

So, Christ by His Spirit commissioned Paul to write verse 11, to remind the church in Corinth that discipline must be exercised and applied with special care, in order that they would not give Satan an opportunity to outwit them. Satan was always attempting to outsmart them with his strategies and tricks. Verse 11 was Paul giving the troubled church in Corinth a warning and a caution! If their church discipline was too lenient, then Satan would be gaining because sin was being minimized or encouraged. If their church discipline was too harsh, it may engulf the offending individual to desperation and perhaps even to leave the Christian church.

Satan was always trying to turn something good – church discipline – into something bad – completely crushing someone. Satan was predictable in cheerleading them to go to excess. We know this about cancer – if the cancer does not get you, the treatment might get you! Satan wanted them all to believe that the proper cure of church discipline made things worse than the disease it was designed to remedy – the sins that were committed. We know this about Satan.

Satan's goal is to open a wound in the life of the local church, and leave it unhealed as long as possible.

Conclusion: Two steps to restore fellowship. 1) Reinstate our forgiveness and 2) reaffirm our love.

1. Re-instate forgiveness on earth since Christ re-instates forgiveness in heaven.

When there is genuine repentance, there must be full-scale reinstatement of forgiveness. Colossians 3:13, "*...as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*" Right along with the forgiving is the comforting. We are to reinstate comforting each other. We reassure each other with the gospel of Christ, the grace of our Lord. We forgive in the sight of Christ, who died and rose again to forgive us!

2. Reaffirm our love. Churches heal their fellowship by words of encouragement. Hebrews 3:12-13, "*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one*

another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Fellowships must not allow a forgiven sinner to turn away from brothers and sisters and abandon the faith because of a church's lack of love. John Calvin wrote, "Whenever we fail to comfort those that are moved to a sincere confession of their sin, we play into Satan's hands." Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Just because it is 2 steps, does not mean this is easy. I end with an illustration to show it can be the hardest thing we have ever had to do, and we need Christ's strength to do it. SI – Corrie Ten Boom wrote about forgiving a Nazi guard, years later, when she met him. She tried to smile. She tried to raise her hand to shake his hand. She could not. She felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. So again she breathed a silent prayer, "Jesus I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness." As she took the hand of the Nazi guard, the most incredible thing happened. From her shoulder along her arm and through her hand a current seemed to pass from her to him, while into her heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed her.

Satan is ever ready to deepen division and spread bitterness.

Jesus is ever ready to bring forgiveness and spread love.

Satan is always leaving sores open that ooze with despair.

Jesus is always bringing closure and healing, with the balm of comfort and bandaging of peace.

Each believer and each congregation lives in the presence of Christ Himself, and He who sees all of our sins, restores all of our fellowship by His death and resurrection, and His grace and love.