

2 Corinthians 6:11-13 Opening Hearts Falls Ch. AM 3/23/2025

Remember when our mothers called us by both our first name and middle names? That was how we knew that Mom had something serious to say from her heart! Sometimes, she might call out our first and middle name if we were in trouble. But there was another instance that Mom would use our first and middle name. If we were very sad, she would console us using both our first name and your middle names, and speak to our hearts words of love and encouragement.

In a similar way, in the letters of Paul, he only referred to the church members by name whenever Paul was deeply stirred with something serious to say. In Galatians 6:1, Paul called them Galatians. In Philippians 4:14, Paul called them Philippians. As we will see, the same was true in our passage. But first let me back up and connect our verses to their wider context.

Back in chapter 5:18-19, Paul's emphasis was on God reconciling people in the world to God Himself, focusing on the relationship of humans to God. Once that was accomplished, then humans were equipped and obliged to become reconciled to one another. That is, once they were right with God, the vertical dimension, then they became agents of repair for their relationships with each other, the horizontal dimension of Christians to Christians. Since that was the backdrop to our passage today in chapter 6:11-13, we see that Paul was examining his own relationship to the Corinthians. As it stood at the time when Paul was writing these verses, the church in Corinth was only partially reconciled to Paul, and so Paul was seeking to advance that reconciliation to a full status. Paul's goal was to restore the completely cordial and reciprocal relationships.

It was Paul who was initiating this further movement toward harmony. Paul was being Christ-like when Paul became both an agent of repair and a participant in the repair. Christ was an agent by His death and resurrection, and Christ was a participant by His own heart being opened to us and by Him treating us as if we had never sinned! That brings us to our main point today: **Since God's heart is open to us, He provides us with the ability to open our hearts to each other.**

1. Opening our words, opening our hearts. (v.11)

Paul was in the habit of opening his heart to the churches that he served, and thanking his churches when they opened their hearts to him in return. For example, we read in Philippians 4:15, "*And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.*" Paul addressed them directly, calling them Philippians, and Paul expressed his warm appreciation for their initiative in financially supporting God's work that Paul was doing. Similarly here in 2 Corinthians 6:11, Paul addressed the believers directly and by name, when he called them Corinthians. Verse 11, "*We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open.*"

Here Paul wrote not merely about the freeness of his speaking to the Corinthians, but Paul also wrote about the openness of his heart to them. There was more here than merely Paul's uninhibited speaking, or Paul's honest speech. The phrase here "...*we have spoken freely to you*" is literally translated as "our mouth is open to you..." which carries the meaning of being completely open with someone verbally.

In the word choice of Paul, he used the two words for mouth and open, followed by the two words heart and open. So, Paul in writing verse 11, progressed in his communication to the Corinthians. In the Greek language, Paul moved along from "mouth" to "heart," and Paul moved along from "open" to "wide open." We could translate Paul's words into English this way, to gain the effect of his choice of words, "our mouth is open to you Corinthians, and our heart is wide open."

Paul was reflecting the teaching of Jesus - that our mouths express what is in our hearts. Paul knew that Jesus said this to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:34, "*You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*" Notice the profound teaching of Jesus. If it was uniformly true in one direction - that evil-hearted persons, such as the viper-like Pharisees, only spoke evil words - then it was also uniformly true in the other direction, that good-hearted persons only speak good words. Here was the analogy that Jesus had used in the previous verse, Matthew 12:33, "*Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit.*" The fruit uniformly grows out of the root. Roots of an apple tree always produce the fruit of apples, and roots of an orange tree always produce the fruit of oranges. The heart of love and openness produces loving, open speaking.

Paul had an enlarged heart toward them, which was evident in his wide-openness to them despite the limited impact of his first letter to them, and the pain experienced during his first visit to them, and his desire to spare them a second painful visit by next writing a second letter to them instead. Paul wrote to them in order that they could see and know the intensity and depth of Paul's love for them.

2. A limit is caused by our own withholding of affection. (v.12)

Verse 12, "*You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections.*"

The idea of the enlargement of Paul's heart in verse 11, now triggered the opposite notion in verse 12 of the restricted hearts of the Corinthians. Paul was asking them to admit that there was a narrowing or a restricting or a confining of their attitude toward Paul. The word Paul chose was the word "restricted," which was the idea of a lack of space.

The point Paul made in verse 11 was that Paul's heart was not restricted, or that Paul's heart was not lacking space for the Corinthians! Paul had embraced all the Corinthians within his expansive heart!

Now setting side-by-side verse 11 and verse 12, Paul was displaying for them the difference between his own heart towards them, and their hearts toward Paul. We could express Paul's message this way, 'You are enjoying full spaciousness in my affections, and I continue to love you all with an ever-expanding heart, meanwhile, there is insufficient room for me in your hearts.'

Here in verse 12, Paul skillfully focused attention on the attitude of the Corinthians. Paul was shining a spotlight on their need for growth in this area. Paul was straightforward and direct in writing to them a serious concern about their attitudes that was damaging. They did not provide to Paul the full love that was comparable to Paul's unrestricted love for them from his wide open heart.

Especially ironic, as we will see in the coming chapters, was the double mistake of the church in Corinth. There were newcomers who entered the church in Corinth, and the Corinthians provided a warm welcome to those newcomers, despite the fact that the newcomers brought in a false Christ and also the newcomers took advantage of the Corinthians. Meanwhile, for the genuine apostle who truly loved them, the Corinthians provide only a cramped, begrudging response. Clearly, Paul expected that a warm and affectionate relationship could and should exist between an apostle and a congregation of his brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul's expectation and teaching was that this open-hearted, two-way relationship was something that both the apostle and the members ought to always keep seeking to achieve, since Christ has opened his affectionate heart to us all.

3. An apt reply to an expanding heart, is to expand our hearts too. (v.13)

Here in verse 13, Paul made a specific and overt request to the Corinthians that was so personal that it was the kind of request that only a parent could make to his or her own children.

Verse 13, "*In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.*"

Paul desired complete harmony in his relationship with the church in Corinth. In verse 11, Paul has given them assurances of Paul's total openness with them in both Paul's speech and Paul's affection. In verse 12, Paul has stated unequivocally that whatever was preventing a deep mutual affection was a problem that was located on their side of the relationship, since it was not located on Paul's side of the relationship. So, now in verse 13, building on verses 11 and 12, Paul issued his request and his challenge to the Corinthians. It was time to write it, time to say it, time to spit it out. Here Paul challenged them to widen their hearts! In effect, and in context, Paul was challenging them to match or mirror Paul's affection towards them. To say it another way, Paul asked the Corinthians to

respond in kind to Paul's loving initiative. How? The only way that was fitting. The Corinthians would need to reciprocate by opening wide their hearts to Paul.

In one summary sentence that encapsulates verses 11-13, Paul was basically saying this to the Corinthians, "Let me have some return from you for my affectionate frankness and love toward you." The whole paragraph relates to unrequited love, not in a romantic relationship, but rather in a spiritual relationship between the apostle and the church that he had started.

In a 3-word summary of verses 11-13, Paul wrote, "Love me back!" Love me back! As an appropriate reply to Paul's wide-open heart, Paul was requesting that the church give back to Paul their own wide-open hearts as the only equivalent or commensurate response. Looking ahead, Paul was asking the Corinthians to ready themselves for Paul's next visit to them, by providing their complete candor with Paul and increasing their warm love to Paul.

The reciprocity that Paul was seeking to obtain was on the order of the reciprocity of parent and child! Paul was communicating with them as any father would communicate to his own children. Add to that the reality that the Corinthians were actually Paul's spiritual children in the faith, which means that it was Paul who brought them the gospel when God converted them to Christianity. So, Paul was on good ground to make this request, and in the context of verses 11 and 12, it was powerfully persuasive since had Paul reminded them that they were his children in that distinctively spiritual respect.

Love given, should be matched by love in return. Children ought to love a loving father or a loving mother. It is true in family relationships, and it is true in the spiritual family. Spiritual love should be matched by spiritual love in return. Converts ought to love the apostle who was loving them. So, Paul as a spiritual father was naturally distressed whenever his spiritual children failed to reciprocate his expressions of love for them.

Conclusion:

It is natural to love people who love us, but it is supernatural to love people who hate us.

The church of Christ Jesus is necessarily a place of supernatural, open-hearted love. Our hearts and words reflect the cross, and who we are in Christ.

Romans 5:10, "*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.*"

Christ through His gospel has opened His heart to us and sacrificed His life for us, in order to reverse us from enemies of God to being reconciled to God. We are turned around and we walk with God and live in a Christ-like way to others.

So, the topic of our study today hits us where we live. When we become aware that people are unwilling to open up to us, the best way forward is to open

up ourselves to them, rather than simply regarding that relationship as a lost cause. Doing so will make us feel vulnerable, especially if they reject us even more. Still, that is the path of love. That is the path of Christ. That is the way of the cross, the *via dolorosa*. Our Lord Jesus walked that way for each of us. He calls us to walk that way in love to each other.

Since Christ opened His heart to us, we open our hearts to others. Even this difficult requirement of Scripture arises from Christ's love for us.

What if you love someone, and they won't love you back? You have in this passage the Christ-like way, is to keep on loving them with a widening heart. We keep opening our hearts wider to keep on loving people for whom Christ has died. Loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is the way that we show our love in return to Christ for what Christ has done for us. If there is room in our hearts for Jesus, then there is room in our hearts for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, "*Whatever you did to one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you have done to Me.*"

The apostle John wrote about God's action to give us open and loving hearts in 1 John 4:19-21, "*we love, because He first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*"