

The Book of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Session 18: Church Discipline, Forgiveness, and Repentance

Second Corinthians has a lot in it. I have chosen to present it within the context of the eight categories of the Sufferings of Christ. We are presently studying the second category, which contains three accusations against Paul: 1) that Paul does not genuinely love the Corinthians, 2) that Paul does not care about them as a church, and 3) that Paul is not concerned about the things happening to them. I know these may sound like they are saying the same thing, but they are not.

Second Corinthians 2:1-4 reveals Paul's honest love for the church at Corinth. If you missed this, then please go back and look at the previous sessions because this issue of godly love truly is at the heart of our sonship lives.

Can we pause here to talk about this for a moment? The love that I am talking about here is not an emotional feeling Paul had for the Corinthians, but it was a decision Paul made to value and esteem the people in the church at Corinth.

Paul had to be taught how to love the Corinthians with godly love and charity, and so do we. We are taught the five core features of godly love in Romans 12:3-13:7.

We get the first core feature of godly love generated in us by the doctrine in Romans 12:3-8, and this love is for the other members of the local assembly in which you belong. These five features of godly love cannot be generated in us apart from the doctrine in God's word, so you can see how important it is for you to have the Romans doctrine working in you.

Once we have these features of godly love up and running, they are further developed as we continue our sonship education. The sonship education is not just about learning some things, but it is about being transformed by the power of God's grace so that Christ is actually living His life in you and through you on a moment-by-moment basis. This is not only for our life here on earth, but this efficacy of this education will determine our specific vocation in the heavenly places in eternity, so it is really important.

This is why, if you have joined us since we completed our study in the book of Romans, it is imperative that you go back and pick up those doctrines. If you do not know the doctrine in Romans, you cannot fully understand what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians.

Lest you think this is too much trouble, let me encourage you by pointing to someone in our assembly who is doing this. Martin and Shannon Dettle, who live in the panhandle of Texas, were with MBI back when I first came out to West Texas, but that was before we had Zoom and before we were streaming our Sunday and Tuesday sessions. After those things came on line, they were able to join us live for the sessions, just as they are listening right now. My point is that they missed some things back in the book of Romans.

I got an email the other day from Shannon, which I thought would encourage us all, so I asked her permission to share her email with you. If you missed the book of Romans and you are thinking about going back and picking it up, this letter is for you. If you have been working on your prayer life, learning to pray like an educated son or daughter, this letter is for you, too.

Good evening, Pastor Mike, Your lesson yesterday was immensely helpful to me. Even though I attend the Sunday morning and Tuesday evening lessons by Zoom, I've actually just finished Romans Education 2. I'm working to catch up to the current lessons.

After your lesson yesterday, I decided to listen to all 45 lessons in RE2 again and write 45 prayers as I go, using the techniques that you taught us yesterday. This is an extremely intimidating process because I feel like a kindergartener learning addition surrounded by students of trigonometry. I wrote a prayer today for Romans 12:3. I wanted to share it with you.

*Heavenly Father,
I am grateful for Your unconditional love and the gift of grace which was provided to me through the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. You have given me mercy when I deserve justice. As I study Your word and learn Your doctrines, I want to stay*

humble and grounded in the reality of what I deserve in contrast to what You have provided for me. As I put Your doctrine into practice, I desire to leave natural human reasoning behind. Instead, I want to think like You, Father. I want to see every member of the Body of Christ just as You see them, without sin, righteous, and at one with You. We will all be vital to the function of the heavenly places. No job is more important than the other. I will focus on the fact that we are one united body, no competition and no comparison. It is my sincere desire to stay rooted and grounded in these truths. In Your Name I Pray, Amen.

I wanted to take a moment to let you know how I'm progressing in my studies. I believe that this process will help me immensely as I endeavor to be edified. Thank you so much for everything you do. In Christ, Shannon Dettle

Now, if you missed Romans, I hope you understand just how important it is for you and now you have decided to go back and get it. How can you do this? You can do this by either going to our Dropbox, finding the videos and notes for the book of Romans, and just start listening. You can call the toll-free number and ask Tracy if you need the link to Dropbox or if you need help finding the studies for the book of Romans.

If you would like to go through the accelerated education, then please contact Larry Daniels, who will help you get caught up. You can email Larry at led130@hotmail.com. Or, you can get ahold of Tracy and she can put Larry in touch with you. We care about you and we want to do everything we can to help you.

We are presently studying the second accusation.

Second Corinthians 2:5-11 show Paul's honest care for the church at Corinth. Paul is undergoing the Sufferings of Christ, which means he is being targeted by those "fiery darts" we talked about in the book of Ephesians.

Beginning in verse 5, Paul is talking to the Corinthians regarding a man in the church who had been guilty of a sin against the church, which was of such a nature that Paul had to counsel the church to withdraw their fellowship from him. This is what we refer to as "church discipline."

The purpose of this church discipline was twofold: 1) to protect the church from the spiritual damage of such behaviors within it, and 2) to lead this man to repentance and restore him to the fellowship of the church. The church that we are a part of on this earth is a microcosm of the entire body of Christ once we get into the heavenly places. We learned this foundational truth back in Romans 12 when we were taught the various ways we can labor with our Father within this local assembly. This was part of the spiritual foundation every one of us must have if we are to view our church and each other properly. Therefore, if you joined us since we finished the book of Romans, I cannot overstate how important it is for you to go back and get the Romans doctrine working in your life.

In our previous session, we talked about how difficult it can be for a church to practice church discipline. At the same time, once a church has done so, there is another danger that we must be aware of: the lack of forgiveness and restoration to those who repent.

Forgiveness is meant not only to save the offended from being a prisoner to resentment, anger and animosity, which would eventually destroy him if left unattended to, but it is also meant to confirm our love toward the other person (the offender). We will see the proof of this when we get to verse 8.

(For those who are interested in more information about this issue of forgiveness, we covered this in the Sonship Transformation book.)

In this case, the man has evidently come to his senses and stopped his previous actions, (as we will see in verses 6-8).

When someone is repentant, that is the time when we comfort them and bring them back, so they are not overwhelmed by the guilt of their actions. In other words, too harsh a chastisement may lead to despair in the heart of the offender and may drive them away from the Lord instead of restoring them. Paul, as a previous persecutor of the church, knows something about this kind of guilt and the effect it can have.

Just because Paul is dealing kindly with the offender does not mean that Paul is downplaying the sin and its consequences within the church at large. Paul

acknowledges the consequences of the offense, yet he leads the Corinthians in a process of restoration, which can take place because of the repentance of the offender.

Even though this is important to understand, do not forget that this shows up within the context of a whole other subject.

At first, the connection between verse 5 (forgive the one who has caused the pain) and Paul's defense of his decision not to immediately return to Corinth may not be obvious. In verse 5, Paul shifts from explaining his travel decisions and the severe letter he wrote to them, to addressing how the Corinthians were responding to someone who was central to the conflict they had previously had with Paul.

The fact that Paul counsels the Corinthians the way he does is a demonstration of his genuine love and care for everyone in the church, including this man who was adversarial to Paul. But Paul also wants the Corinthians to know that the grief caused by this unnamed person has affected the whole church, not just Paul.

In verses 6-8, Paul observes that the punishment of the offender has worked, and it is time for the church to forgive and encourage this person so the offender is not overwhelmed by his punishment.

2 Corinthians 2:6 Sufficient to such a man *is* this punishment, which *was inflicted* of many. ⁷ So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. ⁸ Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm *your* love toward him.

In these three verses, we see that the punishment carried out by the church was enough to bring about repentance. Now it is time to offer forgiveness, which includes restoration to the church, comfort, and a reaffirmation of love to the offender. I say a reaffirmation because they were never supposed to stop loving him, even when the church was disciplining him by withdrawing their fellowship. It is now time to embrace this brother and welcome him back into the fellowship.

The Corinthians followed Paul's lead in church discipline, and now they will follow his lead in extending forgiveness and restoration. Looking at verse 8, do you

remember what I said to you just a few minutes ago? I said that forgiveness is meant to confirm our love toward the other person (the offender).

2 Corinthians 2:9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

In verse 9, Paul gives us another reason for writing the severe letter; he writes to test the Corinthian's obedience, in this case, to see if they will apply discipline when it is called for. In a more general sense, the proof of the Christian life is measured by its obedience to God's word rightly divided.

Paul has genuine love and care for the church at Corinth, which is further demonstrated by his desire to "prove" their "obedience in all things." In this case, it is ultimately for the good of the church that they withdraw fellowship from this man until he repents of his sin. This means the whole church needs to participate in the discipline. If it is only halfway done, it will not be effective to bring the man to repentance, which is the purpose after all.

The first test was the discipline of the rebellious within the church. The majority of the Corinthian church correctly responded by withdrawing fellowship from the offender. The second test was the forgiveness and restoration of the offender who has now repented. In this instance Paul's "test" is not just to see if they will do what he tells them, but he is demonstrating his great care of them by his desire to see the doctrines of love, forgiveness and restoration working in them. And there is the connection between this issue of forgiveness and Paul's defense against the accusation that he did not genuinely care for the Corinthians. He didn't just say it, he showed it by his actions.

2 Corinthians 2:10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the person of Christ; ¹¹ Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Paul forgave the man because of the man himself having value to Paul as a member of the body of Christ. Paul wants the man to recover from his error and be reconciled with the church. That did not mean Paul was not willing to apply the

necessary discipline, but Paul had genuine care for this man who was an adversary to Paul.

Let's make a practical application. In our church, as we learn and apply Paul's sonship doctrine; if there comes into the church someone who begins to have an issue with the doctrine, and they speak out to oppose it and cause division within the church, then it would be important for our church to withdraw our fellowship, while we love this person and hope for them to be reconciled back to the church. We can forgive them in the person of Christ, but we cannot comfort or restore them until they have repented. Church discipline is a difficult and painful process, but it is ultimately for the good of both the offender and the church.

But in verses 10-11, Paul is exhorting the assembly to forgive the offender by giving two more reasons he has forgiven the man:

- 1) For their sake. Verse 10b says "for your sakes forgave I it." What does that mean? The key here is that Paul has forgiven the offender. Yes, the offense was against Paul personally, but it still affected the whole church. If Paul had refused to forgive, it would have caused continued hard feelings throughout the church, which, as we will see, would produce the very opening Satan was looking for to do his disruptive work in the church. Therefore, it was for their sakes (to prevent those continued hard feelings and their spiritual consequences) that Paul forgave the man.
- 2) For the sake of Christ. Yes, Paul forgave the man so it would not adversely affect the rest of the church, but he also "forgave I it in the person of Christ." This is the main reason for forgiving someone, because of Christ's forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, **even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.**

This is how forgiveness works under grace. We should not wait for our offender to say they are sorry, we are obligated to forgive because we are forgiven. Forgiveness does not mean restitution, for that cannot come until after the repentance of the offender. But we can forgive them "in the person of Christ" so to speak. Let me ask you a question: this man, whom I believe was not one of the interlopers but was a

man who is part of the church (which is why he is not named); if he is a believer in Christ as he is presented to be, has Christ already forgiven this man's sin against Paul? Was that covered by the cross? It was. So, on that basis, Paul can forgive this man "in the person of Christ."

Paul tells them he has forgiven the offender, and he has done so for the good of the whole church, so that Satan would not take advantage to exploit the situation.

2 Corinthians 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Paul was not ignorant of Satan's devices, but Christians today are ignorant. And one of those devices is to use an unforgiving spirit to divide and conquer the body of Christ. And this becomes another proof that Paul cares for the church at Corinth, because he does not want Satan to get an advantage over the church. The way this would work is like this: if the church did not readmit a repentant sinner to their fellowship, Satan would use that refusal to do injury to the one and also to the whole church. Refusing to forgive would, under the pretense of duty and holiness, allow Satan to tempt them with harsh measures and continued severity of discipline.

Church discipline would then be represented not as corrective, but as destructive. The enemies of Christ would then use this as an occasion to discredit the ministry.

I want to say one final thing about this, although there is so much more that could be said. When people read this passage, especially in today's culture and society, they think it too harsh and punitive. But from the biblical perspective church discipline is actually a profound expression of grace. It offers a healthy form of accountability, which leads to patterns of Christian living. It is one of the gifts of true biblical community within the church.

There are churches that think they are "grace" oriented, while all the while never confronting blatant and public sin. This may be due to a lack of maturity within the church, or the distraction of more pressing matters within the church, or even a mistaken view of grace. Either way, a church that does not understand the true nature of church discipline (confrontation and consequences) and restoration to

the penitent (repentance and restoration) will never know the benefit of true restoration, and that church will be crippled in the areas of holiness and restoration.

The other pendulum swing is those churches that practice church discipline with zeal, reveling in confrontation, which relish handing out consequences without godly love and a view toward restoration are prime tools for Satan's tactics. This too is wrong and this also cripples the church spiritually.

The following quote I thought was found: Basil in *The Long Rules* (question 7, in PG 31), but I could not find it. I did, however find it in: C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952, pp. 105-106)

“Christianity does not want us to reduce, by one atom, the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery. We ought to hate them. Not one word of what we have said about them needs to be unsaid. But it does want us to hate them in the same way in which we hate things in ourselves: being sorry that the man should have done such things, and hoping, if it is anyway possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere, he can be cured and made human again.”
“Our orientation toward our sinful neighbor should be like our orientation toward ourselves: as hopeful that he can be freed from his sins as we hope to be freed from our own.” (pg. 106)

True church discipline must not be neglected, but must be given in love, with appropriate measures and for the purpose of renewal and restoration.

Paul's sacrificial care of them is seen in his attitude and actions toward those who have been a source of grief in the church towards those who have rejected Paul and his ministry. Paul leads the church to discipline the rebellious, not for personal or punitive reasons, but for their own good, so they might recover from their error.

This is exactly what Paul taught Timothy.

2 Timothy 2:24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient,²⁵ In meekness **instructing those that oppose themselves**; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the

acknowledging of the truth;²⁶ And **that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil**, who are taken captive by him at his will.

It is Paul's love for these offenders that motivates him to discipline them. This is supposed to be the motivation for every parent when they discipline their children; it is for their good and for their benefit. And that is the motivation for church discipline as well.

Paul demonstrates his selfless care of the church by moving the offenses that were committed against him personally, to being concerned about how it will affect the church as a whole. Paul knows that an attack against him is an attack against the church, and that is the larger issue in Paul's mind.

Paul leads the church to discipline the rebellious because he understands that the future of the church depends upon how they treat certain behaviors. Tolerating moral sin or rebelliousness against the doctrine, or divisiveness within the church would eventually destroy the assembly, and Paul knows this. Because he cares for this church, and wants it to flourish spiritually, and be what God designed a church to be (the pillar and ground of the truth – 1 Timothy 3:15), he leads them to exercise church discipline at the appropriate times.

Paul leads the church to restore and comfort those who repent of those kinds of offenses, which do damage to the church. His care of both the individuals who have sinned and the church as a whole is manifested in his own forgiveness, and his instructions for them to restore them back into the fellowship.

Paul demonstrates his great care by teaching them to deal with both the rebellious and the penitent among them, which if not done properly, will eventually destroy the church by failing to preserve themselves from error, or by overmuch harshness and unforgiveness.

And lastly, Paul demonstrates his genuine care for them by his desire for Satan not to get an advantage over the church. He wants to protect them from Satan's devices.

- Second Corinthians 2:1-4 showed Paul honest love for the church at Corinth.
 - Second Corinthians 2:5-11 showed Paul's honest care for the church at Corinth.
 - Second Corinthians 2:12-13 will show Paul's honest concern for the church.
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