

The Ministry of Restoration
2 Corinthians 2:5
Part 1

The army in their recruiting efforts has adopted a very catchy slogan: “**Be all you can be.**” So let me ask you a question. Can the army actually fulfill their slogan? And what is the answer to that question? The answer is no!

The army cannot make us “**all that we can be**” because the army cannot set us free from our sin. And as long as sin is our master our lives will never reach their full potential in this life or the life to come.

But if we are genuine believers having exercised faith in the gospel of Christ and are, in fact, in Christ, then based on **Romans 6:1-7** we are now free from sin. We are free from its penalty, from its power and one day even from its very presence.

Unfortunately however there are times in a believer’s life when they willfully and consciously choose to walk in sin. And this choice has significant and disastrous ramifications on many different levels and one of those levels that will be affected will be Christian fellowship.

1 John 1:7 tells us that if we walk in the light as He is in the light we will have fellowship one with another. Therefore by implication if we choose not to walk in the light, but rather in darkness, there is no way that we can possibly have fellowship one with another on an experiential level.

In other words, if a brother or sister in Christ chooses to consciously and willfully walk in sin we will share nothing in common with them spiritually on an experiential level. Their praise will be shallow and superficial, their prayers will be like cardboard, their service will become grudging. In this state, though they may be still with us, they are in truth separated from us spiritually on an experiential level.

And it is extremely important for their sake, for our sake, and the Lord’s sake that we, as best as we can, when this occurs, do all that we can to restore them.

And this brings us to our message this morning as we continue to study the book of **2 Corinthians**.

We have been considering Paul's defense of his change in travel plans in **2 Corinthians 1:12-2:4**. But we are now transitioning in our study from Paul's defense of his travel plans to his instruction to the Corinthian church concerning their treatment of a particular brother in Christ who had in the past chosen to willfully and consciously walk in sin but who had recently repented.

In the midst of Paul's instruction to the Corinthians concerning their treatment of this particular man in **2 Corinthians 2:5-11** we learn a great deal about the ministry of restoration.

And this is where our focus will be over the next three weeks. So, what can we learn from **2 Corinthians 2:5-11** about the ministry of restoration?

First of all, we can learn how the conscious willful choice of one person in a congregation to walk in sin will negatively impact the entire congregation (2 Corinthians 2:5). In fact, the conscious willful choice of one person in a congregation to walk in sin has the potential to actually devastate an entire congregation spiritually.

This is the truth. And my hope for the message this morning is that this truth might come alive for us as we examine **2 Corinthians 2:5** and so much so that when we become aware of someone within our fellowship who has willfully and consciously chosen to walk in sin that we will recognize how important it is to their life and to the life of this church that we respond in a manner that would seek to honor Christ and guard the spiritual welfare of His church. So let us begin this mornings message by looking at **2 Corinthians 2:5**.

Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 2:5**. **“But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.”** The person that Paul is referencing in 2 Corinthians 2:5 had caused sorrow, not to just a few people within the Corinthian congregation, but he had caused sorrow to the whole of the congregation. Isn't this exactly what the verse says? **“But if any has caused**

sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.”

So who is this person who had inflicted such great sorrow upon the whole of this congregation? The early traditional view was that the man who had inflicted such great sorrow upon the whole of the Corinthian congregation was the incestuous man identified in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

And I believe that this view is the best view. So let me read these verses for you so that you might be able to see what he had done and ultimately how he had caused the church at Corinth to experience such great sorrow.

“It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. (2) You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. (3) For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. (4) In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, (5) I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

This person, who Paul is instructing the church at Corinth to separate from here in **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**, is the very one, I believe, Paul is referencing in **2 Corinthians 2:5**. And this, I also believe, as I have already shared with you is in my opinion the best view and any attempt to identify the man mentioned in **2 Corinthians 2:5** with any other man can be, I believe, easily dismissed.

And why do I believe that the man that Paul refers to in **2 Corinthians 2:5** is the incestuous man that Paul spoke about in **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**? I believe he is the man because I believe that this man, in the mind of Paul, had come to personify the very heart of the problem that Paul was continually seeking to address within the church at Corinth. And what was that problem? The Corinthian church had a very lackadaisical and indifferent attitude toward those in their fellowship who had chosen to live sinful lifestyles and

therefore by extrapolation a very lackadaisical and indifferent attitude toward sin in general.

And why would I say this? What was the heart of the first letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church according to **1 Corinthians 5:9-11**? Wasn't it to call the church to separate from so-called brothers and sisters in Christ who had consciously and willfully chosen to walk in sin and were refusing to repent? Of course it was! Let me read for you **1 Corinthians 5:9-11** and see if this was not so. **“I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; (10) I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. (11) But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”** This is Paul's summation of his first letter to the Corinthian church.

And did they heed this letter. No! We know this because Paul in his very next letter to them, the letter we know as **1 Corinthians**, exhorts the church to separate themselves from the incestuous man that we read about in **1 Corinthians 5:1-5** who in essence had become the poster child of all that was wrong with the church at Corinth. And therefore in light of these things this is why I believe that it was the incestuous man that Paul was referring to in **2 Corinthians 2:5**.

And this fits very well with the verse. So let us go back and read the verse one more time. **“But if any has caused sorrow [and the implication is that someone had, in fact, caused sorrow] he has caused sorrow not to me, but to some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.”**

These words raise an interesting question. If the man that Paul had referred to in **verse 5** was, in fact, the incestuous man of **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**, how could Paul say that the incestuous man had not caused sorrow to him in light of what Paul said in **1 Corinthians 12:26** when he said that if one member suffered every member suffered? So how can Paul's statement in light of what he taught the Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 12:26** be explained? What could he possibly have meant when he told them that the incestuous man had not caused sorrow to him?

When Paul said that the incestuous man had not caused sorrow to him in 2 Corinthians 2:5 he was simply downplaying the impact of this man's sin upon him in comparison to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:29; 1 Corinthians 12:26).

Did the choices of the incestuous man cause Paul to suffer? Based on **1 Corinthians 12:26** of course he did. In fact, I believe that the incestuous man had personally attacked Paul when Paul went to the church on the so-called sorrowful visit just prior to his writing of **2 Corinthians**. But even in spite of the pain the incestuous man had caused him, Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that whatever pain or sorrow he may have suffered because of the sinful choices of the incestuous man was miniscule when compared to the pain that they had suffered. And that is why Paul in **2 Corinthians 2:5** said, **“But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you.”**

Paul had been negatively impacted by the choices of the incestuous man, but the church at Corinth, from Paul's perspective, had been devastated by him and had therefore experienced a far greater degree of sorrow than he himself had experienced.

So how did this particular person do this? How did he inflict sorrow on the whole of the congregation in such a devastating way?

First of all, in order for a local church to be all that they can be at any given point in time, every individual part of that local church must be working properly (Ephesians 4:11-16). Let me read for you **Ephesians 4:11-16**. **“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, (12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; (13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (14) As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; (15) but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, (16) from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint**

supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

So let me ask you a question. Based on the truths shared in this passage, can we become all that we can be in Christ at a given point in time both individually and corporately if an individual or individuals in this congregation consciously and willfully choose to walk in sin? And the answer would be of course not! How could we in light of the fact that our growth is dependent upon the proper working of every individual part?

Therefore in order for us to be all that we can be both individually and corporately in Christ at any given point in time we need every person in this fellowship to be living with a clear conscience before God based on what they believe the Word of God teaches.

If they do not we will all suffer and all of us will have cause for sorrow. And certainly this was true in respect to the church at Corinth. The whole of the church was being impacted by this man’s willful choice to walk in sin. There was no way that the individual members of the Corinthian church or the church corporately could be all that they could be as long as this individual in their church continued to walk in sin.

But this was not the only source of sorrow for the Corinthian church in respect to this man who had consciously and willfully chosen to walk in sin. In fact, it was just the tip of the iceberg in respect to the sorrow that was inflicted upon the Corinthian congregation by this particular man.

So, what do I mean? The greater part of the sorrow experienced by the Corinthian congregation was caused not simply because a man had chosen to walk in sin but the congregation knew about it and had tolerated it.

In other words, to have someone in our congregation consciously and willfully choosing to walk in sin is certainly a bad thing but it is even worse when the congregation knows about this and does nothing about it. This is a far worse thing and therefore has the potential of producing far greater sorrow. And this is exactly what was happening in Corinth.

If the church knows of someone in their midst that has willfully chosen to walk in sin and does nothing about it, the cancer of sin will potentially

spread throughout the congregation (1 Corinthians 5:6). Isn't this exactly what Paul was communicating in **1 Corinthians 5:6** when he told the Corinthians in response to their indifference to the immoral lifestyle of the incestuous man "... **a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?**" This is exactly what he was telling them.

So let me ask you a question. Had the leaven of sin spread throughout the Corinthian church? Yes! There were very few of its members if any that were functioning properly. The church had become a mess. And why was this? To a large degree it was because they had failed to separate themselves from so-called brothers and sisters in Christ who were living sinful and immoral lifestyles, and the result was spiritually devastating.

The whole of the Corinthian church was no longer functioning properly. Truly this was a very sorrowful situation. But it was not from my vantage point the apex of their pathetic and sorrowful state.

The pathetic and sorrowful state of the Corinthian church did not reach its apex until the Corinthian church publicly failed to support Paul when he was being attacked during what has become known as "the sorrowful visit." This was the visit that we considered when we examined **2 Corinthians 2:1-4.**

So did Paul suffer when this incestuous man chose to walk in sin? Absolutely! But from Paul's perspective the church at Corinth had suffered far more. This is what Paul is saying in **verse 5.**

And why had they suffered so greatly. They had suffered so greatly because rather than dealing with the sin of their brother in Christ they ignored him. And because they ignored him, not only did he suffer because of his sin, but also the cancer of his sin spread to the whole of the church.

Next week we will have the opportunity to consider how the Lord would have us to come alongside of those struggling with sin, not only in an attempt to restore them to fellowship with us, but also in an attempt to protect the spread of sin with our own church. What did Paul say to the Corinthians? "**A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.**"

May God give us to understand that if we are to become all that we can be, both individually and corporately, sin must be dealt with.