

The Ministry of Restoration
2 Corinthians 2:6-8
Part 2

The Bible teaches us that every person born into this world is born spiritually dead as a result of the sin of Adam. This condition will therefore prevent us from enjoying a personal relationship with God or with the community of the redeemed.

But there is of course some wonderful news. Lord of glory manifested His love for us when He sent His Son into this world to die for us on the cross of Calvary in order to pay the debt of our sin just as the Old Testament Scriptures prophesied thus making it possible for God to extend to us the gift of life.

And if this morning we in fact see the need in our life to be delivered from our sin and its consequences, and if we this morning believe that God as an expression of his love through the death of his Son is not only able but is in fact now offering to us the gift of life, I would implore us to now reach out and take this gift from His hand. And if we do this, what does God promise to us in His Word? He has promised us that we would pass from death to life making it possible for us to immediately begin to enjoy a personal relationship with Him and the community of the redeemed. That is what He has promised us.

From that moment in time we can be assured that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us. And hopefully by His grace we will be continuously assured of the fact of His abiding presence in myriad of different ways, and one of those ways is through our brothers and sisters in Christ who will hopefully become for us the channels through which Christ will express His loving presence to us and this is what will in fact happen when the church is Spirit filled and functioning as God has purposed the church to function.

These loving expressions hopefully will be manifested when we are doing well spiritually, and hopefully these loving expressions will continue to be manifested even when we are not doing as well.

And this thought of how our brothers and sisters in Christ might minister their love when we are not doing so well spiritually brings us back to our

current study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to our present study in **2 Corinthians 2:5-11**.

And what is the question that we are presently seeking to answer in our current study? What do we learn about the ministry of restoration from 2 Corinthians 2:5-11? We introduced this question last week and we will continue to seek to answer this question this week. So, what have we learned so far?

We learned how the conscious willful choice of one person in a congregation to walk in sin would negatively impact the entire congregation (2 Corinthians 2:5).

Isn't this exactly what we learned last week as we considered **2 Corinthians 2:5**? Let me once again read this verse for you just to refresh your memory. **“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.”** Clearly, based on this verse, this one particular man had caused sorrow to the entire congregation.

And who was this man? I believe firmly that this man, as I shared last week, was the incestuous man that Paul had instructed the congregation in **1 Corinthians 5:1-2** to separate from.

Did the Corinthian church heed Paul's instruction in **1 Corinthians 5:1-2**? No! They did not, at least not initially, as we will see this morning. And why did they not initially heed his instruction? First and foremost they failed to heed his instruction when it was first given because they were by and large indifferent toward sin; an indifference that led them not only to tolerate sin in their own lives but also to tolerate sin in the lives of others as well, which was the point of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians referenced in **1 Corinthians 5:9**.

We are now ready to move on in our study of **2 Corinthians 2:5-11**. So now let us back to our text and begin with at **verse 5** and read through **verse 8**. **“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. (6) Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, (7) so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him,**

otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. (8) Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”

So, what is the second thing we learn about the ministry of restoration from **verses 6-8**? Once a willfully sinning brother in Christ has been confronted and if necessary removed from fellowship, he must then be lovingly received back when genuine repentance has been exercised (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). This is hopefully what we will learn today. And may God give us that grace to apply this lesson in order that the love of Christ might be manifested through us to our brothers and sisters in Christ in the time of their greatest spiritual peril.

So let us begin by looking at **verse 6**. **“Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority.”** Now notice something about this verse. This verse indicates that the majority of the congregation had already punished the incestuous man that had caused the Corinthian congregation so much suffering according to **2 Corinthians 2:5**.

So, what was this punishment that the majority of the Corinthian Church had already inflicted on this incestuous man? I believe that we would have to assume the following that the punishment inflicted upon the incestuous man by the majority of the Corinthian church was excommunication. In other words, they removed him from their midst based on 1 Corinthians 5:1-2.

So let me now go back and read these verses for you. **“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.”**

Paul in **1 Corinthians 5:1-2** exhorted the Corinthian church to remove the incestuous man from their midst or to excommunicate him, and it appears from **2 Corinthians 2:6** that is exactly what the majority of them did in response to Paul’s exhortation for them to do so.

And it is also important to note that this action was not an informal action but rather a formal action initiated by Paul the spiritual overseer of the church and carried out apparently in an official manner by the church. Why

would I say this? I would say not only by what we know based on the context but also by the word that Paul chose to describe the action, which was the word “punishment,” a legal term that clearly communicates a formal action.

Was this action, this formal action, taken by the Corinthian church in response to the exhortation of the Apostle Paul consistent with what we know about Christ and what He taught? Absolutely!

The action of excommunication taken by the Corinthian church in response to Paul’s exhortation was completely consistent with the teachings of Christ (Matthew 18:15-17).

Let me read for you the very words of Christ in **Matthew 18:15-17**. **“If your brother sins [and I would add “consciously and willfully for reasons that should be obvious to us. The verse then goes on to say...], go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. (16) But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”**

When Christ said, **“Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector,”** this was just another way of saying if a brother in Christ does not listen to those who are seeking to restore them then let the church excommunicate him; or in other words, let the church put him out from their midst.

So was the action of the Corinthian church, with the encouragement of Paul, to remove the incestuous man from their midst consistent with the teachings of Christ? Yes, it was!

So now let me ask you this question. If the action taken by the Corinthian church was completely consistent with the teachings of Christ, then should we as a church be prepared to take the same action when confronted with similar circumstances? And what is the answer to this question? The answer, I believe, is yes. And this is exactly what we have done and, Lord willing, something that we will continue to do.

When we discover that there is someone in our midst willfully and consciously choosing to live a sinful lifestyle, they will be confronted. If they repent, praise the Lord for then we have gained a brother. But if they choose not to repent and if their sin is similar to the kind of sin committed by the kinds of people identified in **1 Corinthians 5:9**: the immoral, the covetous, the swindlers and the idolaters, then certainly for their sake, for our sake, for the Lord's sake we must put them out of our midst so that, as Paul said in **1 Corinthians 5:5**, their spirit might be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have not had to do this very often. Praise the Lord! And if we, the leaders of this church, choose to initiate this action, we will only choose to do it before the whole of the congregation if either the person is very prominent within the congregation or their sin is known throughout the whole congregation, which was the case with this incestuous man here in the Corinthian church. Otherwise, if the person is not prominent or if only a few people know of their sin then we will as a formal action only call those who know the willfully sinning brother or sister to separate themselves from them.

And of course I would hope that if the leadership of this church approaches you in this regard at some time in the future and calls you to get involved in seeking to restore a brother or sister in Christ or perhaps even separate yourselves from them if they remain unrepentant, I would certainly hope that you would respond to us as the leaders of this church and as the under-shepherds of Christ.

So how had the majority of the Corinthian church punished the incestuous man? The majority of the Corinthian church had excommunicated or had removed him from their midst based on the encouragement of Paul, an action that was totally consistent with the teachings of Christ and totally consistent with the present practice of this church.

So, what happened subsequent to their punishment of this incestuous man? Let us continue on reading our text but this time we will read through **2 Corinthians 2:7**. **“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. (6) Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, (7) so that on the contrary you should rather forgive**

and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”

So let me ask you a question. Did the action by the Corinthian church to excommunicate the incestuous man produce a good result based on the words that we just read in **verse 7**? And the answer would have to be yes! Based on 2 Corinthians 2:7, the action by the majority of the Corinthian church to separate themselves resulted in godly sorrow and genuine repentance on the part of the incestuous man.

Hallelujah! This was a prodigal-son moment. You and I might think that this would have caused the church at Corinth to throw a big party! Unfortunately this did not happen. The majority of the church continued to keep themselves separate from him.

Isn't this clear from the verse? This is the very reason why Paul, in contrast to the punishment that the Corinthians continued to pour out upon this now truly repentant man, said to them at the very beginning of **verse 17**, **“so that on the contrary you should rather forgive him.”**

Now this brings up a very interesting question. As we know the Corinthians for years had seemed to have no problem fellowshiping with this man, even though he had consciously and willfully chosen to live a lifestyle of sin. So, what had happened to cause this very hard, unforgiving spirit in the Corinthian church?

I would like to help you understand the problem they were struggling with, but in order to help you understand I will need to take the little bit of information that we have about Paul's interaction with the Corinthians, subsequent to his writing of **1 Corinthians** and prior to his writing of **2 Corinthians**, and extrapolate from it as best as I can what I believe happened that led them to take such a harsh stand against this incestuous man even though it appears that he had genuinely repented.

Shortly after Paul wrote the epistle of first Corinthians instructing the church to separate themselves from the incestuous man, false teachers had come into Corinth and were seeking to undermine Paul's authority within the Corinthian church, as we will later see in **2 Corinthians 11:7-14**. In light of this threat from the false teachers who were representing themselves as

apostles, Paul makes an emergency visit to the church at Corinth during his third missionary journey in order to deal with this problem. And what happened when Paul arrived? I believe that this incestuous man, joined with the false teachers in attacking Paul. In fact, I believe that he not only joined them but even led the attack. And what did the Corinthian congregation do in response to this attack upon Paul? They did nothing. This encounter with this incestuous man in concert with the false teachers in Corinth, when the Corinthian church sat back and did nothing, is the visit that Paul referred to in **2 Corinthians 2:1-2**, and is the visit that has become known as “**the sorrowful visit.**”

This truly was the low point in all of Paul’s dealings with the Corinthian church. The Corinthian church had become so messed up because their willingness to tolerate sin in their lives and the lives of others such as this incestuous man that they were unable to see the forest for the trees when Paul was being attacked by such spiritually bankrupt people. And who was at the front of the line attacking Paul when Paul had come into the church in order to serve them? I firmly believe, though there is no way to prove my belief, it was the incestuous man that Paul had so strongly lobbied the church to remove from their midst.

Paul, in response to this very sorrowful visit, wrote what has become known as **the “severe letter”** alluded to in **2 Corinthians 2:3-4**. In this letter, Paul, I believe, called the Corinthians, in very blunt terms, to repent of their sinful ways and to once again embrace him as a true apostle of Jesus Christ and to respond accordingly, which of course would necessitate that they would do exactly what Paul had asked them to do and that was to excommunicate the incestuous man. And did this letter have an impact? Absolutely, it had an impact.

The Corinthians, in recognizing how they had dishonored Paul and the cause of Christ, not only punished the incestuous man, but perhaps out of personal guilt felt they needed to continue to punish the man. This of course was totally out of line. Therefore Paul continued on in **verse 7** and sought to set them straight.

So what does he say? Let us once again look at **verse 7** but this time let us read the entire verse. “**So that on the contrary you should rather forgive**

and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”

Paul, I believe, had suffered greatly at the hands of this incestuous man, but here in 2 Corinthians 2:7 Paul is leading the charge to make sure that this man is warmly welcomed back into the Corinthian church.

Paul not only led the charge because this was the right thing to do, but he felt compassion for this repentant man and was seeking to protect him from being crushed under the load of excessive sorrow.

If you are here this morning and are, in fact, a genuinely disciple of Christ, you have become a part of a redeemed community, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hopefully a community committed to living a life pleasing to Christ and committed to loving one another fervently from the heart, as an extension of Christ and doing so, when that might be easy or when that might be hard, such as would be the case if we were actually seeking to restore a brother or sister in Christ who had willfully chosen to live a sinful lifestyle.

May God give us the grace to discipline our brothers and sisters in Christ when necessary and the grace to forgive them when they manifest true repentance.