

The Ministry of Restoration
2 Corinthians 2:9-11
Part 3

What do we learn about the ministry of restoration from 2 Corinthians 2:5-11?

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). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 2:5** and see if this I not so. **“But if anyone has caused sorrow [and the assumption by Paul was that a particular individual had in fact caused sorrow], he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order to not say too much—to all of you.”** And it is this last phrase **“to all of you”** that I believe clearly communicates to us how the conscious and willful choice of one person in a congregation to walk in sin, such as was the case of the incestuous man that Paul introduced to us in **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**, will impact an entire congregation.

And the same thing is true today. If there is just one person in this congregation who is choosing to consciously and willfully walk in sin, it will negatively impact the whole of this congregation, and if there are people in this congregation who know about this person’s conscious willful choice to walk in sin, and they choose to do nothing about it, the negative impact of this person’s choice to live a sinful lifestyle will increase the negative impact of this person’s sinful choices upon this congregation exponentially.

It therefore behooves us, as a congregation, to not sit on our hands when we become aware of someone’s conscious and willful choice to walk in sin but hopefully, by the grace of God, we will, for the Lord’s sake, for their sake, and certainly for our sake, both individually and corporately, be willing to step forward and actively seek to become involved in the ministry of restoration even when it may be difficult for us.

So, what was the first thing that we learned about the ministry of restoration from **2 Corinthians 2:5-11**? We learned about its importance. Or in other words, we learned how the conscious willful choice of one person in a congregation to walk in sin would negatively impact the entire congregation.

So, what was the second thing we learned from **2 Corinthians 2:5-11** about the ministry of reconciliation? We learned that 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).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 2:6-8** and see if this is not so. **“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.”**

The one who had caused so much sorrow in **verse 5**, or the incestuous man that Paul described in **1 Corinthians 5:1**, apparently after an initial delay, had now been punished by the majority of the Corinthian congregation in a manner consistent with Paul’s instruction to them in **1 Corinthians 5:2**. And what had Paul asked them to do? He had asked them to remove this man from their midst or to excommunicate him and now they apparently had in fact done this.

And did this action have a positive result? Did this action to remove him from their midst produce genuine heartfelt repentance? Based on what Paul tells us in **2 Corinthians 2:7**, it appears that it did. Unfortunately the Corinthian congregation was also apparently not in any mood, even in spite of this man’s genuine repentance, to restore him back into fellowship.

Was this a problem? Absolutely! Their unwillingness to receive this repentant man back into their fellowship was a very serious problem.

This is why Paul could not have been more clear about their responsibility to restore this repentant brother than when he told them in **verse 7** that rather than continuing to punish him they needed to forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. And then in **verse 8** adding these very strong words, **“Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”**

So, what have we learned so far about the ministry of restoration? We learned how important the ministry of restoration is, not only to the sinning brother or sister, but also to the entire congregation. Or in other words, we

learned how the conscious willful choice of one person in a congregation to walk in sin would negatively impact the entire congregation.

And what was the second we learned about the ministry of restoration from **2 Corinthians 2:6-8**? We learned about the specific responsibilities associated with the ministry of restoration. We not only learned how important it is for a church to be willing to confront those who are willfully choosing to sin, but we also learned how important it is for a church to forgive those who have willfully chosen to sin once true repentance has taken place.

But we are not done learning about the ministry of restoration. There is one more thing that Paul wanted the Corinthians to know in light of the recent events involving the incestuous man of **1 Corinthians 5** and their dealings with him.

So, what is this third thing that Paul wanted the Corinthian to learn about the ministry of restoration? When a church is presented the opportunity to become involved in the ministry of restoration, that opportunity will become for them a test of their Christian character (2 Corinthians 2:9-11).

Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 2:9-11** and see if this is not so. **“For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. (10) But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, (11) so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”**

This morning my hope for this message is that God might use it to prepare us to respond properly when He provides us the opportunity to become involved in the ministry of restoration knowing that the opportunity that he has provided us is a test of our Christian character or in other words the genuineness of our profession of faith.

So let us begin by looking at **verse 9**. **“For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.”**

Paul in this verse states that the purpose for him writing to them was not simply to solve a particular problem within their church but also to test

them. But in order to appreciate fully what Paul meant by this, there are a couple of things that we need to know.

First of all, what **“writing”** was Paul specifically referring to in **verse 9** and secondly, how did that writing provide for them a test in the matter of them being **“obedient in all things?”**

So, what **“writing”** was Paul referring to? When Paul, in 2 Corinthians 2:9, referred to what he had written, he was referring to what he had written in the “severe letter” that he referenced in 2 Corinthians 2:4. A letter that was written to the Corinthian Church after the epistle of **1 Corinthians** and just prior to the writing of **2 Corinthians**.

This letter, **“the severe letter”** referenced in **2 Corinthians 2:4**, was written by Paul in response to his **“sorrowful visit”** alluded to in **2 Corinthians 2:1-2**, a visit that was prompted, I believe, by the appearance of certain false teachers based on **2 Corinthians 11:12-14**.

It was during this visit, during the **“sorrowful visit,”** that an unnamed individual publicly attacked Paul according to **2 Corinthians 7:12**, an individual who most likely acted as a mouthpiece for the false teachers.

And who was this individual that attacked Paul, and who was most likely operating as a mouthpiece for the false teachers who had arrived at Corinth? It is my opinion that the individual that attacked Paul according to **2 Corinthians 7:12** during the sorrowful visit was the incestuous man who had not only gone unpunished after the writing of 1 Corinthians but who had also been allowed, it would appear, to remain in a place of prominence within the Corinthian church thus allowing him the opportunity to attack Paul, as I believe he did during the so-called sorrowful visit.

It was in response to these events, that occurred during the so-called **“sorrowful visit,”** that Paul wrote the **“severe letter”** that he referenced here in **2 Corinthians 2:9**.

In the “severe letter,” Paul, I believe, called the church in very strong terms to once again renew their loyalty to him as an apostle of Christ and to manifest that loyalty by excommunicating the incestuous man.

This call by Paul that he put forward in the strongest possible terms was meant not only to deal with a real problem that existed within the Corinthian church, as I said, but it was also designed to do something else.

When Paul called the church in the severe letter to renew their loyalty to him and to manifest it by disciplining the incestuous man, he was testing them to see if they would be obedient in all things (2 Corinthians 2:9). Isn't that exactly what the verse said? **“For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.”**

So why was it so important for us individually and corporately to be tested from time to time to see if we will be obedient in all things? The desire to be obedient in all things is a mark of a true Christian. Let me read for you the words of Christ in **Luke 9:23-24. “And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. (24) For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.’”**

True disciples will seek to follow Christ. In other words, they will seek to be obedient in all things.

So why is it so important for us individually and corporately to be tested from time to time to see if we will be obedient in all things? It is important in order to manifest through our obedience the genuineness of our faith.

Paul had done that for the Corinthians when he challenged them in the severe letter to renew their loyalty to him as an apostle of Christ and to manifest that renewed loyalty to him as an apostle of Christ by separating from the incestuous man as he had repeatedly asked them to do.

And did they pass the test? And the answer is yes! The Corinthians passed the initial test presented to them in the severe letter when they renewed their loyalty to Paul as an apostle of Christ and manifested it by excommunicating the incestuous man. In doing this even though it was obviously a very difficult thing for them to do in light of how long it took them, it proved to Paul that they were in fact prepared, as the disciples of Christ, to be obedient in all things.

Paul, being reassured that the Corinthians were prepared to be obedient in all things based on their punishment of the incestuous man, was confident that they would restore him since he was now repentant (2 Corinthians 2:10). We see this confidence in **2 Corinthians 2:10**.

Let me now read this verse for you. **“But one whom you forgive anything [in other words the incestuous man], I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ.”**

Paul is anticipating, based on their recent willingness to separate from the incestuous man, that they would in light of his repentance forgive him or restore him back into fellowship with them through an official action taken by the church.

And was Paul prepared to support their action when it came? Absolutely! What did he say? He said this, **“But one whom you forgive anything [or in other words the incestuous man], I forgive also [present tense].”** In other words, when you take the formal action to restore this man whom you have punished based on your belief that he was truly repented, Paul was saying that he was fully prepared to honor that decision and to receive him and to embrace him and to love him in the same way as Paul hoped that they would receive him and embrace him and love him.

And then what does Paul say in **verse 10** that helps us to see how he could support their action even in spite of all the suffering that this man caused both in respect to the church and as well as to himself? He was able to do this because he had continuously been exercising forgiveness in respect to this man and held nothing at all against him at any time even in spite of all the trouble he had caused.

Let us continue to read **2 Corinthians 2:10** and see if this is not so. **“But one whom you forgive anything [in other words the incestuous man], I forgive also [in other words I will support your formal church action whenever it comes and then he says]; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything [or in other words, if I forgiven anything in respect to this incestuous man and the implication is that he had and had done so over a long period of time he had done so], I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ.”**

Paul had done what every Christian should do. He had immediately and continuously forgiven this sinner the hurt that the sinner had caused him. Paul's personal testimony concerning how he had forgiven the incestuous man throughout time on a personal level served as an important example to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:11). If Paul could forgive this man on a personal level when he was unrepentant, then certainly the Corinthians could forgive this man through an official church action when he was genuinely repentant.

How important was Paul's example to the Corinthian church? Extremely important! Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 2:11**. **“So that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”**

May God give us the grace not to give Satan an advantage by either neglecting, mismanaging or abusing the ministry of restoration.