

3. Learning to Restore Those Who Sin

In our last topic, we saw that Paul and Timothy had faced false accusations from some of the Christians in Corinth. Instead of trying to exercise his authority as an apostle, we saw that Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that he did not have dominion over their faith. Instead, he reminded them that they were fellow workers and partners in the ministry of the Lord. In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children become fellow workers and full partners in ministry. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul had treated them as partners by reminding them that it was their responsibility to discipline a brother that was living in open sin in their church. In our topic today, we are going to see that the sinning brother had repented and Paul now tells them how to restore the brother.

In 2 Corinthians 2:1-2, we read, “But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?” Paul had determined within himself that he would not come to visit the Corinthians in sorrow. The word that is translated “determined” here is most frequently translated “judged”. It means *to judge or to pronounce an opinion about what is right and wrong*. Paul used this word a total of 9 times in 1 Corinthians 5 and the first six verses of chapter 6. In those two chapters, he pointed out that Christians are to exercise discipline when a Christian is living in open sin. However, they are not to judge those who are unbelievers. Here, Paul said that he had reached the conclusion within himself that he would not come to visit the Corinthians in sorrow. Paul realized that when he had written to them about the need to discipline the sinning brother, he had caused them sorrow. Now, he wanted to come in joy.

Paul had written previously to the Corinthians with great sorrow. 2 Corinthians 2:3-4 says, “And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is *the joy* of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.” Paul describes what he felt within himself as he wrote to them about the brother that they needed to discipline. Paul wanted to experience joy when he came to visit them this time. He had confidence that the joy that he had was the joy of all of the Christians in Corinth. The word translated “confidence” means *to persuade or be persuaded*. Paul was persuaded that the Corinthian Christians were also filled with joy about the man that had repented of his rebellion after living in open sin.

Paul said that he had written out of much affliction and anguish of heart. He said that he wrote with many tears. He said that he had written to them because of the great love that he had for them. Here, we see that Paul shows again the great concern of a spiritual parent. In 1 Corinthians 4:15-17, Paul had written, “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” These verses were written just a few verses before he wrote about the need to discipline the Christian living in open sin. In these verses, we see that Paul had written with a heavy heart

because of the love that he had for the Corinthian Christians. Now, he was filled with joy because he could write to the Corinthians to help them understand how to restore another.

The church had exercised discipline and this had caused the brother that had been living in open sin to repent. Now, Paul wanted to help the Christians in Corinth learn what it meant to forgive and restore the brother to the fellowship of the church. 2 Corinthians 2:5-7 says, “But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent--not to be too severe. This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.” Paul realized that the sinning brother had caused the Christians in Corinth to experience grief. The word translated “grief” means *to make sorrowful or to cause to be sad*. The church in Corinth had experienced sorrow as they had followed the instructions of Paul and exercised discipline toward the sinning brother.

Paul wanted the church to realize what they were to do now that the man had repented of his sin. Paul did not want the church to be too severe in their discipline. The discipline of the majority of the church had accomplished its purpose. Hebrews 12:11 says, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” (NASB) Discipline is always painful. However, here, we see that godly discipline done in a godly way will produce a harvest of righteousness. This means that godly discipline will lead to repentance instead of causing a person to feel rejected. It will also produce an inner peace in the lives of each of those who have been affected by the discipline.

Paul said that the punishment that had been inflicted by the majority was sufficient for the man. We notice two things in this statement. First, not everyone in the church had participated in the discipline. Some of the people had ignored the action of the church. However, we do see that a majority of the people did participate in the discipline. Second, we see that Paul said that the discipline was sufficient and it was now time to restore the man since he had repented. Galatians 6:1 tell us that if someone is caught in a sin, someone who is spiritual should restore him gently. The goal of any church discipline is restoration of the person that is living in open sin. This is to be done with gentleness. Otherwise, those involved in the action will be tempted to sin themselves.

As a result, the church was now to do two things. They were to forgive the man and also to comfort or encourage him. This was necessary so that he would not be destroyed by sorrow. The word that is translated “forgive” means *to pardon or let go*. This word is used twice in Ephesians 4:32 where we read, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” We see that we forgive others because of the fact that Christ has forgiven us. We also see that we are to encourage the person that we forgive.

Part of the ministry of encouragement to a person that has been disciplined by a church is to restore that person to the full fellowship of the church. 2 Corinthians 2:8-11 says, “Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him. For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive*. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan

should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” Here, we see how to restore a person.

The first thing to do to restore a person to the fellowship of the church is for the church to reaffirm the love of the church for that person. The word that is translated “reaffirm” means *to confirm publicly*. The word that is used for love is the word that speaks of the love that Christ has shown to us. In Luke 15, we are given three illustrations of great rejoicing when a lost person repents. In the same way, a church should have a time of great rejoicing when a person that has been disciplined repents.

Paul also explained the reason why he had written to the church. He said that he had written to the church to put them to the test and see if they would be obedient. The word that is translated “test” means *approved or tested character*. Paul used this word to describe Timothy in Philippians 2:22 where we read, “But you know his proven character, that as a son with *his* father he served with me in the gospel.” Here, we see that Paul pointed out the fact that by taking action to discipline the sinning brother than the church had shown their godly character. Now, Paul was asking the church to show its obedience by fully restoring the brother that had been living in open sin.

Paul also said that whoever they forgave, he also forgave. Paul said that he had forgiven that person in the presence of Christ. Here, we see that Paul recognized all that he did was done in the sight of Christ. He wanted the church to know that he had fully forgiven the sinning brother and that Christ could give testimony of that fact. Here, we see that restoration involves full forgiveness because we want to please Christ.

We also see a final reason for fully restoring a person that has sinned. We recognize that it is important to fully restore so that Satan will not take advantage of us. John 10:10 tells the goal of Satan when that verse says, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” The goal of Satan is always to steal, to kill and to destroy. We need to realize that he will try to destroy the peace and unity of both the person that repented and also of the whole church if he can destroy that peace.

Paul said that we know Satan will try his best to take advantage of us because we are not ignorant of the way that Satan works. The word that is translated “devices” speaks of *the evil purposes of Satan or the way a person thinks*. One of the ways that Satan will try to work in our lives is to cause us to keep thinking evil about the person that has been restored. We want to help our children understand that true forgiveness means we will no longer hold past sin against that person. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to restore a person that has lived in open sin.