

The Book of 2nd Corinthians

Chapter 2:1-11

November 22, 1998

- **Outline of 2nd Corinthians:**
 - Chapter 1 God equips His people through trial, comfort and perseverance.
 - Chapter 2 Restore fellowship to the repentant;
- **Review & Introduction**

Recall that there are Christians who differ as to whether this is his third letter or whether 1 Corinthians is the "severe letter" often referred to or whether there is another missing epistle. For our purposes we will not be attempting to solve the mystery because it appears that from a plain reading of the text, there must have been some letter prior to 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 5:9) and that there may have been another prior to 2 Corinthians. However, this really makes no *doctrinal* difference because the meaning of his teaching can be plainly discerned by what the Lord has preserved for us—that is to say, God has not left us with confusion. More specifically, I will be assuming that the context of the verses we consider today begins in 1 Cor 5 with the man in an immoral relationship and the admonitions that Paul gives to the church with regard to that matter.

Recall also, that Paul here appears to be addressing two accusations brought against him in the church by those who are attempting to undermine his authority. The first being that Paul is wishy-washy or fickle in his thinking because he had said that he would visit the church twice at some particular time and instead only came once. The second is that because his thinking is questionable, therefore his doctrine and teaching should also be suspect. He responds to these charges by providing the purposes behind his decisions and provides additional teaching to the church.

- **Exposition of 2nd Corinthians 2:1-11**

23 Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.²⁴ Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand.¹ But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.² For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?

- We begin here in verse 23 of the prior chapter because it marks the beginning of his sustained thought better than verse one of chapter two. It is interesting to note that at the beginning of this argument Paul begins by swearing by the omniscience of God. There exists much confusion about proper swearing in the church but note here that Paul was not in sin by invoking God as his witness. We are to live in such a way that our words are regarded as faithful by themselves. If swearing or oath taking is necessary, we are not to invoke anything other than the name of God when we give an oath or swear to something. We are not to swear by a stack of bibles or by heaven or earth or any other thing but we may take oaths in the name of the Lord as long as we are sober-minded enough to do so without taking His name in vain.
- As we considered last week, it is God who establishes us in Christ and makes us to stand in Him. The means by which God causes us to stand in Him is faith. Therefore, even this faith which allows us to stand in Him is provided efficaciously so that the foundation of our salvation is *His* faithfulness.
- Paul now explains that he had determined that it would not be fruitful to visit the church at Corinth in sorrow. His letter had caused them grief but he wanted to give time for the Spirit to provide conviction and repentance through his teaching. He had discharged his responsibility to address the issues with them and then waited for God to provide the fruit. If he heaped-on the admonitions, they might become exasperated and Paul could not bear to do such a thing to the people whom he loved very much. His purpose in not returning the second time, as he had previously promised, was to spare the church of too great a burden for them and himself.

3 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.⁴ 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 wrote his strong instruction letter (most likely 1 Corinthians) so that when he visited the next time their hearts might be prepared to receive further instruction from him. He believed that they would be a faithful church and had a great deal of fondness for them, so it pained him to write such sharp words to them.
- The purpose of the strong letter was to grieve them over their sin but not to grieve them to the point of despair. True joy only comes with a true grief over sin. If we do not grieve over our sin we cannot enjoy the true bliss of holy fellowship with our Lord. Paul weeps for his brethren for their sin and longs that they could see that his actions were motivated by his deep love for them. If Paul had taken other actions with them, he would have shown disdain for them.

5 But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe.⁶ This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man,⁷ 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.

- This begins the part where it is difficult to understand Paul's involvement in the situation. Paul talks about the extent to which *he* has been grieved by some offender versus the degree to which the Corinthians were grieved. After a careful examination, it seems quite reasonable that the man he speaks of is in fact the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who was partaking in a kind of immorality that is not even named among the pagans.
- Although there was some extent to which Paul was grieved by the behavior of the fellow, Paul appears to have been more grieved by the behavior of the church in response to his sin. The local body of saints would be more directly affected by the sins of the immoral man.
- It appears that the church faithfully complied with Paul's instruction to excommunicate the man and through that process God apparently granted the man repentance. Their separation and admonition of the man had been used by God to restore the spiritual sanity of the fellow and now, once repentance appears to be genuine, fellowship should be restored so that he does not despair of his condition and think that God has abandoned him.

8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.⁹ For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.

- I believe that here we have the very heart of this instruction. Out of love, Paul wrote harsh words to the church. Out of love for God, the church was to obey Him in all things. Out of love, the church was to exercise discipline on the sinner. Out of love, they were to forsake fellowship with him while he persisted in his rebellion. Out of love, they were to demand that he change his behavior and create a division between him and the church if he refused. And now, out of love, they are to *reaffirm* their love for him by extending the right hand of fellowship and warmly welcome him back. Note that they are not told to *establish* their love for him but rather to *reaffirm*. The entire process of church discipline is a manifestation of love for the saints by the Church and for Her Lord.
- Paul teaches that he wrote for the purpose of testing the faithfulness and loyalty of the church. When a church refuses to discipline, it demonstrates that it is not loyal to Jesus Christ. God has demanded that the church go through very precise and often painful steps in disciplining someone who names the name of Christ but persists in unrepentant sin. It is not a question as to whether this seems proper *to us* for our current culture. No, our Lord has commanded us to carry these things out and therefore, we must do them by faith.
- A church that refuses to carry out church discipline is a church that has spiritual AIDS. Such a church has no means of fighting off the infection of sin and heresy because the immune system is shut down.
- There are three primary motivations for carrying out church discipline (these are in order). First, we must carry out church discipline because our Lord has commanded it. Second, we must carry out church discipline because we have been commanded to put evil out of our midst to protect the purity of the church. And thirdly, we are to carry out church discipline because we are to demonstrate our love for the offender. Remember, nowhere has God promised us that going through this process will actually lead to repentance of the offender. If God, in His mercy, chooses to do so, we rejoice. If God chooses not to, then we rejoice that He has seen fit to grant purity in the church yet all the while continuing to pray for mercy on the offender.
- Our civil magistrate has come to greatly misunderstand its role in correcting wrongdoers. The State is not given by God the role of *disciplining* criminals—it has been given the job of *punishing* them. Biblical discipline seeks the restoration of the offender and longs for their growth and maturity as granted by God. Biblical punishment is judicial and impartial to repentance but seeks to maintain order and peace in the civil realm and the actions of the State are unable to produce repentance. In our country, the State seeks to yield repentance and therefore pretends to be a saviour. Only the Spirit of God can lead a man to repentance and produce works in accordance with such repentance.

10 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,¹¹ lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.
NKJV

- It appears that as Paul was central to giving the instruction to the church on this matter, there must have been those who criticized him and attempted to bring his instruction into question so as to dissuade the church from carrying out the discipline. Paul teaches that Satan is clever enough to use the faithlessness of a church who refuses to discipline to further the kingdom of darkness. In the same way, he also uses the faithlessness of a church who refuses to restore fellowship to the truly repentant.