

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

APRIL 20TH–21ST, 2024 // 2 CORINTHIANS

A PAINFUL VISIT (2 CORINTHIANS 2:1–4)

Paul had been criticized by some in the church at Corinth because he'd changed his travel plans and apparently not kept his promises to come visit them.

- Paul was being accused unfairly of being fickle, untrustworthy, and unreliable.
- When there's misunderstanding and we respond by assuming the worst of other people, it's very hard to restore trust.

The real reason Paul hadn't paid the Corinthian church a second visit was because he wanted to preserve their relationship (vs. 1–2).

- Paul's most recent visit to Corinth had apparently been full of conflict, confrontation, and pain.
- If Paul came to Corinth again, his presence might cause them more pain, and then "who [would] cheer [him]?" In other words, another painful visit might have greatly harmed their relationship.

Instead of a second visit to Corinth, Paul wrote them a letter (vs. 3–4).

- As he considered all the complex dynamics of the issues with Corinth, Paul wisely chose to write them a letter instead of paying a personal visit.
- Apparently Paul wrote to them about some very serious things—he wrote this letter of correction and confrontation with many tears and a broken heart, but he did it from a place of love.

"... A TIMELY WORD—HOW GOOD THAT IS!" (PROV. 15:23B)

Communication has often been defined as the right message to the right people at the right time in the right way—if any of those things are off, it can change the meaning entirely.

- Wisdom is knowing when to speak, when to be quiet, and how to say what needs to be said in truth and in love.

"... DON'T JUDGE ANYTHING PREMATURELY..." (1 COR. 4:5)

When there is misunderstanding or disappointment in a relationship, we need to be careful not to assume motives or allow a story to build in our minds that may be inaccurate.

- Love doesn't keep a record of wrongs, finds no joy in unrighteousness, and bears, hopes, and believes all things (1 Cor. 13:5–7).

OFFENSE AND RESTORATION (2 CORINTHIANS 2:5–8)

Paul refers to a specific person in the Corinthian church who has "caused pain," not just to Paul, but to the entire church (v. 5).

- Paul doesn't say this man's name, but some commentators believe this was the same man living in sexual sin from 1 Cor. 5 or perhaps a different man who opposed Paul and stirred up division in the church.
- Our sin doesn't just affect us.

Whoever this man was, he was under church discipline ("punishment by the majority...") and that discipline was sufficient (v. 6).

- Apparently this man's discipline had been effective and he had repented—now it was time to forgive and restore him (v. 7).
- Extending forgiveness to someone who has wronged us is not an easy task—sometimes we mistakenly view forgiveness as weakness.

In a culture that encourages us to villainize and dehumanize those who have wronged us, things like vengeance, resentment, hatred and retaliation get repainted as "justice," and things like reconciliation and forgiveness are seen as signs of cowardice.

- You and I are most Christ-like when we willingly choose to forgive and reconcile with those who have wronged us (Eph. 4:32).

The unnamed offender was sorry; he'd repented, and now it was time for this church to comfort him by welcoming him back into fellowship. Otherwise, he may be "overwhelmed by excessive grief" (v. 7).

- Shunning, shaming, and making a person pay for their past sins without any road back to restoration can lead to totally crushing them and pushing them away.

"REAFFIRM YOUR LOVE TO HIM..." (V. 8)

At its core, unforgiveness is a lack of love and an act of disobedience to the "royal law" of love (James 2:8) given by God.

- Unforgiveness and resentment tear and split apart families, marriages, friendships, and churches.
- The greatest demonstration of love, both from God and from us as believers, is forgiveness.

THE REASON FOR WRITING (2 CORINTHIANS 2:9–11)

One reason Paul had written the letter of correction was to test them and see if they would be obedient in everything (v. 9).

- In the past, the Corinthians had been obedient in exercising church discipline, but now would they practice obedience in showing forgiveness to the repentant?
- Forgiveness is just as much a matter of obedience to Jesus as anything else He commanded.

The unnamed offender had sinned against Paul, yet Paul cared more about the fellowship and unity of the Corinthian church than he did his own personal feelings and pride (v. 10).

- Paul forgave this man for the church's benefit—an atmosphere of love, grace, and forgiveness in the church is beneficial for everyone.
- Paul did this "in the presence of Christ": Jesus knows our every thought, word, and deed.

Forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation were to be extended in this church so that Satan would not take advantage of the situation (v. 11).

- How does Satan take advantage of situations like this?
- Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:26–27 that our sinful anger and resentment can lead to giving the devil a foothold in our lives—a strategic position from which he can attack.

Satan "takes advantage" of situations in which we've been wronged by often appealing to our pride—he lies to us by telling us we're right in being offended and holding a grudge.

- Satan wants to steal our joy, peace, and our unity and relationship with others.

- Satan "takes advantage" by using our unforgiveness to hurt and crush that other person and draw them away from the Lord.

"WE ARE NOT IGNORANT OF HIS SCHEMES..."

Once we start to recognize Satan's schemes in destroying relationships, gaining a foothold in our lives, and dividing God's people, the need to reconcile and forgive becomes essential in our spiritual lives.

- If you're holding onto unforgiveness, bitterness, or resentment, you are allowing Satan a level of control in your life.

LIFE OR DEATH (2 CORINTHIANS 2:12–17)

Paul wasn't careless or sloppy in how he made his ministry or travel plans. In fact, he was very prayerful, thoughtful, and intentional in how he decided where to go.

- Paul's commitment to preaching the gospel led him to Troas, a city in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey, Acts 16:9–10).

- God had opened the door for Paul to be there and apparently blessed his work (v. 12).

Even though there had been an open door for Paul in Troas, Paul had no rest in his spirit or peace of mind (v. 13).

- Paul had sent Titus to Corinth with the strongly worded letter (vs. 3–4) and made arrangements to meet up in Troas.
- When Titus didn't arrive on schedule, Paul aborted his ministry work in Troas to go to Macedonia to hopefully meet up with Titus and hear about the situation in Corinth.

PAUL'S POINT IS THIS:

The Corinthians meant so much to Paul that he'd ended his ministry in Troas for their sake.

- As a spiritual leader, sometimes tough decisions have to be made. At certain times, you are always going to let somebody down.
- Paul did not make his plans haphazardly or recklessly—they were prayerful, thoughtful, and intentional decisions.

"THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO ALWAYS LEADS US IN CHRIST'S TRIUMPHAL PROCESSION..." (V. 14)

What Paul wanted his critics to know was that he was simply interested in following God, not his own whims or fancies.

- The detours and disappointments of his ministry might be misunderstood, but Paul was sure that God was in control and Christ was victorious.
- The language is taken from a Roman Triumph.

A "Roman Triumph" was a special tribute that Rome gave to their conquering generals (like a ticker tape parade).

- To earn this special honor, a commander would have had to defeat at least 5,000 enemies and gain new territory for the emperor.
- As the general proceeded through the city, prisoners of war were marched through the streets and fragrant incense filled the air.

To those marching in the winning army behind their conquering general, the aroma of his presence was the smell of victory!

- But to those defeated prisoners of war who were conquered and set to be executed, the aroma of this triumph was like the "aroma of death."
- The triumphal procession of Christ's victory on the move through God's people means different things to different people.

To Christians and those whose hearts are receptive to the gospel, the message of Jesus is like a sweet-smelling perfume that signifies victory over sin and death.

- But to non-Christians and those in bondage to sin, the message of Jesus is the aroma of death that raises the terror of divine judgment.

- How we live and work as Christians is a matter of life and death to the lost world around us.

None of us are adequate or worthy of this great honor in being a part of proclaiming Christ's victory, yet God, in His grace, has invited us to play a part (v. 16b).

- Because this is such an important message of life or death, we're to speak it with sincerity before God as His message to humanity (v. 17).
- We are not to market or sell this message for profit as so many do.

LIVING FROM CHRIST'S VICTORY.

- Christ has conquered sin, death, and Satan's dominion in our lives through His victory on the cross.
- As Jesus is at work and on the move throughout our world, our job is simply to follow Him and proclaim His victory.
- If we're truly following Him, our presence as Christians in the world will be noticeable.

LIFE OR DEATH.

- If we're truly following Jesus, our presence and influence will either:
 1. Point people to Christ and His victory.
 2. Remind people of God's holiness and judgment.
- Are we representing Christ and His message accurately and sincerely?
- Is our faith visible and noticeable?

FALLING PREY TO SATAN'S SCHEMES.

- Christ conquered sin, death, and Satan's dominion in our lives when we surrendered to Christ.
- Anytime we choose unforgiveness and resentment instead of forgiveness and reconciliation, we're allowing Satan a strategic victory in our lives.
- Are we holding onto any unforgiveness? Why?
- Are we obeying Jesus in forgiving others?