

Reaffirming Your Love

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[Turn to] 2 Corinthians 2:1–11. If you have ever studied 1 or 2 Corinthians, you probably know that Paul wrote four letters to the Corinthians. The Corinthians had a lot of problems because Corinth was a pagan place [and] a major trade route, [where] everybody seemed to drop their sinful practices off. [As a result], the people at Corinth were entrenched in paganism, and idolatry, and every sort of gross immorality, drunkenness, and vice. Paul preached the gospel at Corinth on his second missionary journey [and] established a church there. People came to repentance, he disciplined them, he saw them grow, [and] the church was getting a good footing. He left; problems arose—personality cliques, problems with immorality, with giving, and serving, and [the] Lord’s Supper, and spiritual gifts, and Christians suing one another, and divorce, and just about every other thing. Most of the Corinthian [believers had come] out of this pagan culture, and they had so much baggage [that] they were having trouble growing in sanctification because their whole previous life had been totally isolated from anything that had to do with Judaism, or a holy standard and a holy law with a holy God.

Paul alludes to [the] first letter he wrote to them in 1 Corinthians 5:9, which tells us that 1 Corinthians in our Bibles is really the second letter. [It’s] a little confusing, but the one we have [as] 1 Corinthians, is Paul’s second letter. According to 1 Corinthians 7:1, after Paul wrote that first let-

ter, [the Corinthians] asked him a bunch of questions because they wanted to get clarification about certain issues. This is when Paul wrote to them this book we have as 1 Corinthians. When news of the reception of his letter came back to Paul, he discovered that there were still problems, so he was grieved because [the Corinthians] were in a lot of sin, and sorrowfully he went there to try and fix things. But, in his absence, false teachers had arisen in the church—false apostles—and they had discredited the apostle. When he showed up, these false teachers actually attacked Paul, rebuked Paul, discredited Paul, and *no one* came to his defense. He left broken-hearted.

He left, knowing that his fledgling church plant was overrun with false teachers, and it just grieved him to no end. Eventually, [however], Paul's righteous anger and indignation overcame his depression and grief, and he wrote a third letter to them, one that theologians refer to as the "severe letter," where Paul just blasted them. He blasted them for putting up with the false apostles, for not coming to his defense, and for tolerating sin. You probably know, if you've ever written a letter when you've been emotional, that [it] is not a good time to write letters. You type it out, or pen it out, and you seal it and send it, or hit the "send" button on your computer, and [then] you think, "*What* did I just do?"

That is exactly what happened to Paul. He was wondering, "Was I too harsh? I wonder how they took it. I wonder if it did more damage than good." Paul was anxious to see how they received his severe rebuke, so he sent Titus there. Titus went [and] found out what happened, and then met Paul at Troas, where he gave him an update. This is referred to in 2 Corinthians 7:6–7. Titus told Paul that most of the Corinthians repented of their sin and acknowledged their support of Paul and his apostleship. You can imagine how relieved Paul was: "Yes! They confronted the sinner; they obeyed God." [Then] Paul wrote a fourth letter to them, and that is the letter we call "2 Corinthians." But, Titus' report also said [that], yes, they dealt with it, but that there were still people in the church whose confidence about Paul as an apostle was shaken. And so, Paul writes 2 Corinthians, the

theme [of which] is a defense of Paul's apostleship. All the way through the book, he writes different arguments defending his apostleship so that they will listen to him and follow him and not false teachers.

That is the context of 2 Corinthians. If you have your Bible, please follow along as I read 2 Corinthians 2:1–11:

But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again. For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful? This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.

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. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 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, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

From this text, you are going to see four directives about dealing with somebody who is in sin, and who has repented of sin so that God will be

glorified and so that the Church will be blessed. The first is: You must rebuke others out of love. I think most of us realize [that] the world is pretty messed up when it comes to love. They have no idea what it is. They think love is lust, or infatuation, or warm fuzzies, feeling good, getting what you want, indulging in some sort of sin. I bet you could go to a thousand people on the streets of Burbank and ask them what love is and what love does, and they would not give you the answer that Paul gives us in this text. Remember that true love—biblical love—is not a feeling or [an] emotion. Sure, we always have feelings and emotions, but love is an action, a decision to do what is best for someone else because you love God and you love that other person. So you look in the Scriptures, find out what God wants you to do, and you obey God’s Word toward other people. That’s what love is.

Look at [2 Corinthians 2:]1. Paul says: “But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.” Remember, he went, [was] rejected, left sorrowful, and he is saying now, “Yeah, I sent the severe letter, and, yes, I sent Titus, but I want you to know, I don’t want to go through that again. I *do not* want to go through that again.” He says, “I don’t want to come to you in sorrow again. I want you obeying when I come back next time.”

Look at verse 2: “For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful?” Notice [that] here he says, “You know what? I caused you sorrow, sure. I confronted your sin, sure. I sent the severe letter. But you know who makes me glad right now? The one who makes me glad is the very one that I told you to deal with. That guy, that man is making me glad.” Who is “the one”? We don’t know. There are two common views, but these might not be true.

One view is that Paul is referring to one of the false teachers, false apostles, the ringleader, who is still in the church and still spreading dissension and undermining Paul’s authority. [It] may be that man, who has been confronted and [who has] now repented. A second view is that Paul is referring to the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5, if you remember that man. Paul found out that the church of Corinth was kind of rejoicing be-

cause they were so loving toward this guy who was committing incest with his mother-in-law—a guy who was having an immoral relationship with his mother-in-law. Paul lays into them, [saying], “Don’t you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” [see 5:6]. He says, “You need to judge that man, and you need to remove any so-called brother from the fellowship, don’t fellowship with [him], don’t even eat with such a one.” He finishes by saying again, “REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOUSELVES” [1 Corinthians 5:13]. He hit them pretty heavily. He could be referring to that situation. The fact is [that] we don’t know, but it doesn’t really matter. It’s obvious [that] the man was in sin. The man needed to be dealt with, and the man was dealt with, and the man came to repentance.

Look at [2 Corinthians 2:]3: “This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice.” His whole point is: “I wrote to you the severe letter so that you would do your job as a church, confront the man in sin, put him into public discipline if necessary, and do what is right so that when I came to you I could rejoice and not be sorrowful.” Look at the middle of verse 3: “Having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all.” He says, “And I have confidence knowing that if you did what was right, and I came to you joyful, not sorrowful, because you obeyed God, that seeing me joyful would help you get over your sorrow for me blasting you.” The wording here is pretty complex, but that’s what he said.

Look at the beginning of verse 4: “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears.” Oh, he wrote that letter, the severe letter, and he’s just anguishing. [He is in anguish because he’s thinking of] his church, his little fledgling church—all those people he led to the Lord, all those excited believers he disciplined himself—[and of] being shamed in front of them, discredited in front of them, lied to by this false teacher, and all of them witnessing it. No one [came] to his defense, and they all [believed] the messenger of Satan, and not him. Oh, pain! So Paul, though he blasted them, he did it with tears. He gave them this huge verbal thump in the head with a two-by-four by sending that letter.

Look at the middle of verse 4, where Paul explains his motives for writing his severe letter: “Not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.” Here is the source of our first point. Notice what Paul says here: “I wrote that severe letter because I love you. That’s what I did.”

The world would say, “Love? How could you call that love? How could you write such a mean, nasty, and severe letter, and have it be an act of love?” [It is] because love does what is best for other people. If one letter doesn’t work, and one visit doesn’t work, then you write a stronger letter because you don’t give up. That’s what Paul did. Paul let them have it because when you love God you don’t let unconfessed sin remain in the Church. The Church has to be holy because we are to pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” [Matthew 6:10, KJV], and in heaven it’s perfectly holy. That’s what God wants in His Church, so you go to war with the weapons of your warfare—the truth of God’s Word, and prayer—and you go to battle against false doctrine, and false teachers, and sin in the Church. That’s what Paul did.

I remember this one time, this elder said, “Hey, Jack! Let’s go out to lunch.”

I said, “OK.”

We were eating lunch, and he leaned over, and said, “You know so-and-so?”

I said, “Yeah.”

“You were supposed to call him.”

“Yeah.” Then that’s when he took out the two-by-four, and he went “whack!” Was it fun for him? No. Was it fun for me? No. Was it what I needed? Absolutely. I try and deal with all my correspondence as fast as I can now—[I have] the fear of God. I *do not* want that to happen again. When you love somebody, why *wouldn’t* you do that? Proverbs [27:]5–6 says: “Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.” It is the enemy who doesn’t confront you. It is the enemy who doesn’t want to see

you grow in the Lord. It is the enemy who doesn't take steps to see you pursue holiness. *That is the work of Satan*, not the loving friend.

The question we need to ask is: Why don't we do this more in the Church? It is because we fear men and because we love ourselves. We fear men and what they might say, and what they might do, and the relationships we might lose, and we love ourselves, our ease, our pleasure, our comfort more than we love God. So instead of doing what is right and hard, we do what is easy and convenient for us. That is not love because love does what is best for others, not self. When you love people—really love them in a biblical way—you exhort, and rebuke, and encourage them in their walk with the Lord. This is how love expresses itself: we faithfully wound those we love.

This brings us to our second point: The reason we do this is because sin in the Church is wounding. Look at [2 Corinthians 2:]5: “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.” This is such an incredible verse because this shows Paul's incredible graciousness and humility. When you plant a church, and you preach the gospel, and you get a bunch of little excited believers together, and you begin to meet with them, and train them, and you keep sharing the gospel, and more are added, and more are added, until you have this little group of on-fire believers, and they're excited about the Lord, and they love you, and you love them, and you've poured your life into them, and you've invested in them, and then you leave, and they fall into sin, and you rebuke them, and they keep sinning, and you rebuke them, and they keep sinning, and you visit them, and they reject you, and prefer the false teacher over you, that tears the heart out of your chest. Yet Paul says, “But if any has cause for sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me.” He is totally self-deprecating here, and says, “Listen, it's not about me.” He says, “I don't want to say too much. I don't want to talk about all the nasty details. I don't want to rehash what has gone [on] in the past. I'm forgetting about that. I'm not bringing that up. But you know what grieves me? That he caused sorrow to you.”

I want you to turn over to 2 Corinthians 11, and I want you to see this. This is pretty incredible. [In] 2 Corinthians 11:23[–27] is one of Paul’s arguments for his apostleship. He’s arguing over and over again in different ways for his apostleship, and this is what he says: “Are they servants of Christ?—” speaking of these false apostles:

I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Do you see what he’s saying here? Do you catch [a] glimpse of his argument? He says, “Ask those false teachers if they have suffered for Christ like I have suffered for Christ. You ask them if they have put their lives on the line to bring you the gospel like I have, many times. That shows you I’m an apostle. You ask them that.” The gem of them all is in verse[s] 28[–29]—look there. The granddaddy trial [that] Paul had to suffer is in verse[s] 28–29: “Apart from such external things”—all the things [that] he mentioned [had] happened to him from without—“there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” This is every shepherd’s great burden. You want to see your church grow, you want to see people come to Christ, you want to see them grow in holiness, you want to see them have sound doctrine. To see them in sin [instead], and to see them led away by false teachers is [traumatic]. To think that [at] any moment it could happen is [a] huge burden [from which] you never escape.

[Go] back to 2 Corinthians 2:5. So you know when he says, “But if any has caused sorrow,” speaking of this guy who has sinned, “he has caused sorrow not to me,” when Paul says that, he’s just being kind and humble because it tore his heart out. “But in some degree,” he’s not even going to try to qualify it, “in order not to say too much,” he doesn’t want to rehash the details, this guy has caused grief “to all of you.” Why? [It is] because when the guy sinned and the church followed him, or tolerated that sin, and then Paul had to rebuke them, it hurt the whole church and the guy who sinned. Paul is willing to lay aside all of his grief, and all of his anguish, and just say, “What concerns me is you, all of you.”

May this lesson be ingrained upon our hearts, that when you have unconfessed sin in your life, it hurts everyone in the church. You may think to yourself, “Well, no one knows what my sin is.” God does. The Scriptures say your sin will find you out [see Numbers 32:23]. It may not even be in this life, but one day, you will stand before the Judge of the living and the dead [see Acts 10:42], and you will realize that your unconfessed sin, [which] you wallowed in while coming to church, was the reason that God held back His blessing from *everyone* in the church. Everyone is robbed of blessing when one person sins. This should move us to confess our sins quickly, and to repent of our sins quickly, and to not continue in them. Sin wounds, it defiles, it hurts the whole church.

Believers who love Jesus do not live in a state of unrepentant sin. If you call yourself a Christian, and you know you have lived in sin, and continued in sin, you need to take a serious look at your life. One of two things is true: either you are a believer who has God’s hand heavy upon you, and you will feel the anguish, and feel the misery like David did, and God’s hand will make you waste away as with the fever heat of summer [see Psalm 32:4], or you don’t know Jesus. The solution is the same for both: Repent, confess, and run to Jesus. Paul says in Romans 8:5–8 that those who live in the flesh are hostile to God and unable to please Him. The author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 5:9 that Jesus became the source of salvation to all those who *obey* Him, not *disobey* Him. In John 3:36, John says, “He who believes in

the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son,” that person’s not going to “see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 16:22: “If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed.” Living in sin, not obeying God, is not loving God. If you don’t know the Lord, and you know you don’t know the Lord, quit pretending. It is time to come to Jesus, to know that He died on the cross for your sins, that He suffered for sinners who could not save themselves. When you do that, you will be transformed by God’s saving grace, you will be renewed, you will be changed into a new creature, old things will pass away, and all things will become new [see 2 Corinthians 5:17], and you will wonder, “*Where have I been?* This is so great!” Your joy, and your pleasure with knowing God will far surpass the pleasure you received from your sin. Saving grace is not merely a coat of paint. It is not a veneer of religiosity that we put on our church attendance. It’s not just holy makeup that we use to cover up our black[ened], sinful skin. It is transforming, it is life changing, and that is why the Scriptures call it being “born again” [see John 3; 1 Peter 1:3, 23].

Jesus died on the cross and took the blow for sinners. If you know Jesus, you will stand in heaven one day, and you’ll see that Guy on the throne, your Lord, your Master, the Carpenter from Nazareth, and you will be able to say, with perfect, confident assurance, “I am perfectly holy. My holiness rivals the holiness of God because that Man took my sin upon Himself and He gave me His righteousness.” If you don’t know Christ, *do not wait*. This morning is the day of forsaking your sins and coming to Christ. He will forgive you, He will receive you, He will change you by His grace.

Maybe you are saved, and maybe you know you’ve been entangled in sin, or dabbling in sin. Maybe it’s gone on for years, up and down. You’ve had some victory, and some failure, and you still love your sin. You just haven’t fallen in love with Jesus to the [point] where your grief over [giving up] your sin is less than [the] pleasure you receive from knowing Jesus. It’ll never be the same when you finally say, “Lord, I love You. I want Your blessing. I want Your peace, and I want it so badly. I am not going back to

the vomit anymore” [see Proverbs 26:22]. Do you think God would deny you a request like that? Not on your life. Not on His name.

When someone you love strikes a blow at your heart, when they injure you, when you are despised and afflicted, when you are ill-treated by somebody you trusted, [who] you opened your heart to, there is great temptation to respond in an ungodly way, but we must not do it. When Paul tried to intervene in the church at Corinth, they just sinned against him, and rejected him, and sinned against him, and falsely accused him, and did it to his face when he visited. [They did this to] the Apostle Paul—imagine that—the guy who wrote the bulk of the New Testament, the greatest missionary who has ever lived, the guy who did the miracles of God. They saw him do the miracles of God. The false teachers weren’t doing that!

Paul writes them the severe letter, and guess what? It worked. This brings us to our third point: Forgiveness, comfort, and love must be extended to those who have repented of their sin. Look at [2 Corinthians 2:]6. Notice that Paul says: “Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority.” Notice that the church did public discipline on the guy, the whole majority practiced Matthew 18 on the guy. They didn’t eat with him, they didn’t fellowship with him, they had nothing to do with him. The problem is [that] the guy repented and then the church didn’t know what to do because last time they tolerated the guy and brought him in when he was in sin, and now they’re thinking, “Well, should we keep him ostracized? Should we just not forgive him, and reject him forever?” They didn’t know what to do. They thought, “Let’s ask Paul first.”

Paul answers a question [that] is in between the white spaces [of our text]. Look at verse 7: “So that on the contrary,” they must have said, “Should we just not forgive this guy and keep him an outcast?” [Paul says]: “On the contrary you should rather forgive.” This is the first step that needs to happen. This is what we all need to do all the time to everybody. Forgiveness is not [optional] for Christians. There is never a time when you can’t forgive somebody, [or] when you are right with God and not forgiving, or have any unforgiving spirit. Paul says, “On the contrary, you need to for-

give the guy.” What is forgiveness? Forgiveness is choosing to act toward somebody as if they have never sinned against you. We like to say, “Forgive and forget,” but it’s kind of hard to erase your memory, if you’ve ever tried. When somebody has really wounded you, and those memories are in your mind, and they’re fresh, and they’re at the surface, forgetting just doesn’t work. That’s not a good definition. [True forgiveness is] a choice of your will to act toward somebody as if the offense had not occurred—to not bring it up.

Isaiah 43:25 describes God’s forgiveness with these words: “I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins.” A lot of people say, “See? God doesn’t remember.” Well, yes He does. “Not remember” means “I’m not going to bring them up.” God knows everything, and if He didn’t know something, He wouldn’t be God. He is all-knowing. But God makes a sovereign choice not to act toward you as if you have offended Him. That’s what forgiveness is, regardless of what the sin is. Paul says in Colossians 3:12–13:

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Can you even count the times you have sinned against God, in mind and in deed? Think of it. Think of all those times you have sinned against God. [They are] like the sands of the seashore. You can’t even count them, and all of that is forgiven in Christ and continually forgiven in Christ. That’s how you should do it toward other people.

Look at the middle of [2 Corinthians 2:]7: “And comfort him.” [They were] not only [to] forgive him, but [to] comfort him. They [said], “OK, we’re going to let the guy back in, but just kind of stay away from him.” No: comfort him. People who have gone through this need hugs, and notes, and

telephone calls, and words of encouragement, and kind acts done for them as an expression—a tangible expression—of comfort. Why? Look at the end of verse 7: “Otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” When you get to the place where you realize that you’ve continued on, you’ve hardened your heart to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, you’re sinning against God, you’re sinning against other people, you won’t turn, you won’t turn, and then all of a sudden it comes out and everybody is wounded because of it, that is such a huge, crushing burden and blow upon your soul that the only way you can get out is to apply God’s remedy here, and that’s complete forgiveness and tangible acts of comfort.

Look at [2 Corinthians 2:]8: “Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.” This is the ultimate medicine for every wound: love. This is the sovereign potion that builds up, edifies, and restores to joy people who hurt. We know what love is—Paul tells us about it in 1 Corinthians 13[:4–5]: “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag. . . [it] does not take into account a wrong suffered.” In other words, love forgives. . . even cell phones. We are to forgive like Christ forgave and is forgiving us. We are to comfort like Christ has [comforted] and continues to comfort us. We are to love like Christ has [loved] and continues to love us. The hymn writer captured it well:

O the deep, deep love of Jesus,
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me.

Underneath me, all around me,
Is the current of Thy love,
Leading onward, leading homeward
To my glorious rest above.¹

That’s how we love.

¹Samuel T. Francis, 1834–1925, “O, the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus.”

But what if you're out there, going, "Well, I don't know if I can forgive. I just don't know if I can show comfort. I don't know if I can love"? That brings us to our fourth point: Don't let Satan take advantage of your disobedience. Look at [2 Corinthians 2:]9: "For to this end also I wrote." Now Paul is going to tell us his three-part motive for writing [this letter]. First, look at the middle of verse 9: "So that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things." OK, you disciplined the guy, he's out of the church, he's repented, now, finish it. Forgive, comfort, and love.

Second, look at verse 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." He says, "This is the second motive: I did this for your sakes. I told you to deal with this guy so that you could be a holy church, so that you could be blessed by God."

Third and finally, look at verse 11: "So that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes." It's so easy to be tempted to distance yourself when somebody hurts you, to despise them, to be angry with them, to gossip, to be bitter, to have an unforgiving spirit, to despair, to have excessive sorrow, to doubt, to lack faith in the promises of God, and a host of other sins. These give Satan an advantage, they expose a chink in your armor, and that's where Satan shoots his arrow of sin—right into that chink. Then the whole church suffers more because you didn't forgive, and you didn't comfort, and you didn't love. May we, Calvary Bible Church, never give Satan an advantage over us. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for what we've learned in this text. Oh, what good medicine it is to have You speak to us Your perfect Word. May we receive it implanted, may it perform its work in us who believe. Father, if there are those here who don't know you, may they cry out to you now in repentance, may they confess that they are sinners, that they believe in Jesus, that they want to trust Jesus, and follow Jesus, and, Father, that they would ask You to save them by Your grace and grace alone. And may You do that, and may You get glory for Yourself in it. Father, we are so grateful for the blessing

we are already receiving from obeying You. We rejoice in all You do, and [in] Your perfect providence, Amen.

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