

## Forgive the Man 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

This passage is all about the practice of forgiveness.

C.S. Lewis said, “We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it.”

- In the Hamilton musical, the song about forgiveness is called “the unimaginable” as Eliza has the unimaginable decision to forgive her husband for his failures.
- Or Les Mes - An ex con, Jean Valjean ... has a priest show him grace and that sets him on a whole new direction...
  - He becomes successful guy and helps others...
  - But his nemesis inspector Javert hunts him relentlessly, “You must think me mad; I’ve hunted you across the years; a man like you can never change; A man such as you.” And it ruins Javert.

We love the idea of forgiveness, make films that include this as a dominant theme, but practicing it is another thing.

Two of the hardest **ministries** in the church is that of **discipline** and that of **forgiveness**.

- This passage highlights both, with the emphasis on the latter.
- A healthy church does both.

**Both are commanded, and God blesses a church that takes sin seriously enough to rebuke and discipline, but is also gracious enough to forgive and be reconciled to an offender who has repented.**

Since the Reformers, Protestants have held to three marks of the church: (1) right preaching of the Word, (2) right administration of sacraments, and (3) the practice of church discipline.

- So we must practice discipline for the purity of the church and her witness, and for the restoration of the person.
- Recall 7 Churches in Revelation: Jesus commends the church when they don’t tolerate false teaching and gross unrepentant immorality.

But we must also forgive the repentant. That’s what this text is about.

A church that doesn’t forgive doesn’t understand God’s forgiveness.

- “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.... For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (**Matt 6:12, 14-15**). A daily prayer!
- “But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (**Neh 9:17b**)

- **Psalm 103:** “he forgives all your iniquity... as far as the east is from the west so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (2b, 12)
- **Colossians 3:13:** “if one has a complaint against another [**cancel each other?**], forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

N.T. Wright’s word on this: “**First, it is utterly inappropriate for one who knows the joy and release of being forgiven to refuse to share that blessing with another. Second, it is highly presumptuous to refuse to forgive one whom Christ himself has already forgiven.**”

### **Situation**

- Paul was in Ephesus when he received a negative report about this young church in Corinth that he planted.
- So instead of doing the double visit to the Corinthians, he made an immediate visit, which he said was painful.
- The meeting didn’t go well. There was a big blow up, and Paul left.
- He hasn’t visited the church since.
- He is coming to them soon.
- But he did write a letter (which we don’t have), telling the church to discipline a particular offender, who was the ring leader of a faction.
- That action has taken place, and Paul is thankful. You can catch the spirit of thankfulness in the letter.
- There’s still a minority upset, but the majority listened to Paul and did some work of discipline.

But now a wonderful thing has happened: this offender has apparently repented, and so Paul urges the church now to forgive him and welcome him.

- You see the beautiful balance: rebuke/correct/discipline and forgive/comfort/reconcile.
- Failure to do these ministries allows **Satan** to have the upper hand.

There are five truths about forgiveness that I want you to see.

But first let’s look at what Paul says about the pain caused by the offender and punishment.

### **#1: The Offense and the Punishment (2 Cor 2:5-6)**

#### **A. It was painful to Paul and to the church (v. 5)**

- This was not a “flop” like we see in basketball; it was a real hit.
- Paul experienced joy and pain in his ministry to the Corinthians.
- Theologians Rob Bass and DJ EZ Rock used to sing “joy and pain are like sunshine and rain... love can be bitter, love can be sweet. Sometimes devotion, sometimes deceit. The ones that you care for, give you so much pain. Oh, but it’s all right, they’re both one in the same.”

**What was the actual offense? Who is this “anyone”? This man “him” (v. 8)?**

- We can't be sure.

Some think this is the same guy in **1 Corinthians 5** was involved in an incestuous relationship.

- Paul said, "expel the immoral brother."
- It's possible that this man repented; if he did, the church should welcome him back.
- But there are no clues that this was that fellow.

What we can say with confidence, is that he wronged Paul during the painful visit **(7:11-12)**

- He undermined Paul's authority.

He may have been caught up in the sexual immorality and idolatry of Corinth that was so prevalent.

- It is possible that this kind of behavior would have necessitated a painful visit.
- He may have encouraged the practice of attending the pagan temples, which involved immorality and idolatry – even though Paul condemned such behavior in 1 Corinthians.
- Look at what Paul says in **12:20-13:2** – remember he is about to come visit them.
- It's possible that this man was involved in some of these outrageous sins, and was also leading others to gossip about Paul and slander him.

He at least undermined Paul's authority and was creating a major problem.

Paul doesn't view this as a one-on-one with this guy who has caused "grief" and "pain."

- Paul's concern is for this man being restored to the Corinthians.
- If harmony isn't restored than Satan has the upper hand.

As a side note, all through this letter, you find that Paul never stopped ministering while enduring grief.

- That's encouraging to me. He's writing this letter from Macedonia.
- His heart is broken and he's still ministering the gospel.

Before moving to verse 6, notice how personal **sin affects the community**.

- This is not a popular idea.
- You hear people say things like "I'm not hurting anyone. This is just my decision."
- One's sin always affects others.
- Communal societies know this well.
- This offender has impacted the whole church.
- It was painful for others.

### **B. The punishment was sufficient (v. 6)**

Not only was the offense painful to Paul and the church, but notice that the church had responded with some form of discipline, which Paul now says should now cease.

Apparently this man had displayed the fruit of repentance and Paul says, “**cease.**”

Paul doesn't mention his **repentance** explicitly, but based on the other texts on this issue, he wouldn't have urged this forgiveness and reconciliation without it. (1 Cor 5; 2 Ti 1:20)

By calling for forgiveness and forgiving the sinner himself, Paul is obeying what Jesus taught in the **Lord's Prayer**, and other passages, like **Luke 17:3–4**:

“If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him” (see also John 20:22; Matt 18:15–18).

What was this **punishment**?

- Options range from excommunication to mild rebuke.
- It seems like some church action took place – at least being barred from assembling with the church.
- The sin was severe and public and action was taken.

## #2: The Call to Forgive (2:7-11)

In light of this man's response, Paul calls the church to forgive the man for 5 reasons...

“**Charisasthai**” (charizomai) forgive — “to be gracious to someone” “to give a gift” “to grant forgiveness”

- the more frequent term **aphiēmi**, which conveys forgiveness through the idea of release (*release any feeling of anger or resentment that they have harbored against him*)
- charizomai signifies “**giving**,” the free giving of gifts.
  - Forgiveness is “**for-give-ness**” - an act of giving.
  - Paul tells the Corinthians to “give” forgiveness to the offender.
  - “They don't deserve it” - that's grace! Neither do we!
  - This idea of giving, and the grace of God in Christ is elaborated on later in 8:1–9:15.
- They are called now to embrace him, like the Father whose prodigal son ran away in sin, but returned home.
- **He's calling the Corinthians to do at micro-level, what God has done for sinners at the macro-level. He has granted us forgiveness by grace.**
  - **Psalm 130.4-5**
  - **1 Cor 13 - love keeps no record of wrong**
  - This is what we're doing when we practice forgiveness!
- He's calling them to “be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful.”
- “**They are to hug this sinner back into their very heart**” (Dane)

## 1. Forgiveness brings comfort (2:7)

Paul is concerned that this offender may be “**overwhelmed by sorrow.**”

- So he urges them to forgive him that he may be “**comforted**”

- The word used for “**overwhelmed**” is “**swallowed up**”
- Don’t allow this man to be totally swallowed up in sorrow, but forgive him and comfort him.
- **This is a means healing.**
- In **1 Thess 2:11–12** Paul uses the same word for **comfort** to describe how a father deals with his children: “**encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.**”
- I love the connection with “Comforting” and the exhortation to live worthily of the gospel.
- **The comfort doesn’t terminate with “comfort” but it’s a means of the person to then go on living a fruitful life, worthy of the gospel.**
- Not only are they restored to fellowship, but they are urged **to get back in the game and serve.**

## **2. Forgiveness expresses of love (2:8)**

**This is in the same spirit as verse 7.**

- “**Love the man.**”
- **Don’t just mouth it but show it.**

**Recall Col 3:**

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (3:13-14)

- **Don’t let him be swallowed up in despair.**

“**Confirm**” your love for him – means to ratify a decision legally.

- **Don’t merely exonerate him in a detached way, just quietly allowing him back but keeping him at arms length!**
- **No, fold him back into the fellowship with the kind of love with which God has embraced you with.**
- **This probably implies that something publicly would be done to reaffirm this love and reconciliation, after the public discipline had been met out, and the man had repented.**

**Notice this theme of love already in the Corinthian letter.**

- **Paul had ministered to the Corinthians out of love (2:4)**
- **Now, he urges them to show their love to this man who had wronged Paul and hurt the church.**
- **They are displaying NT spirit:**
  - **“the greatest of these is love”**
  - **the fruit of the Spirit (“love”),**
  - **“let love be genuine,” (Rom 12:9),**
  - **the way of excellence (1 Cor 13),**
  - **the new commandment of Jesus (John 13).**

## **3. Forgiveness is a matter of obedience (2:9)**

- Paul returns to the painful letter, and tells of the purpose of it – which is the same as the purpose of the present letter: obedience.
- The painful letter: discipline this guy.
- 2 Corinthians: forgive the guy.

The principle is the same: be a doer of the Word.

- Be about genuine obedience, the parts you like and the parts you don't!
- Paul was after, as Christ's apostle, their total allegiance.
- This obedience was about full-hearted love for this man and reignited fellowship with the church.

#### 4. Forgiveness pleases Christ (2:10).

**"If I have forgiven anything"** - he's downplaying his act of forgiveness.

- In light of the forgiveness we've received in Christ, it's nothing.
- This is to motivate the Corinthians.

By saying **"for your sake"** Paul is leading the way and calling them to join him.

Paul says that his act of forgiveness is for the sake of the church and it's done before **"the face" or "presence" of Christ.** (Lit)

- The living Christ is looking on as Paul models forgiveness in approval.

All forgiveness of others is fueled by an awareness of the forgiveness we have received by God through Christ (Eph 4:32)

- Christ is present in church discipline; and his present in forgiveness of those who repent (Matthew 18:15-20; 23-35, **6 billion vs 12k**)
- We forgive because we have been forgiven.
- Forgiven people, forgive people.
  - It doesn't mean there are no consequences.
    - David was forgiven but there were consequences: his reign and family suffered.
    - You may go to jail.
    - The thief on the cross died.
- With that said, we forgive by the power of Jesus before the eyes of Jesus.

#### 5. Forgiveness thwarts Satan's plans (2:11)

- Don't let Satan get an advantage Paul says.
- He wants to destroy the church.
- Think about the references to Satan and relationships:
  - Classic conflict text: **James 3:13ff, Eph 5:26-27**
  - Not the only way he is at work (2 Cor 10; 4), but it's a big one.

**Judith Diehl: "It is Satan's desire to divide and destroy the Christian church, the family of God, and the family unit of human beings. He would love to sidetrack, discourage, or effectively negate all Christian ministry.... Satan can successfully steal our**

**encouragement, our confidence, and our joy. His tools include doubt, injury, unforgiveness, and disappointment**

- **He can do so by tempting a church to take sin lightly and let sin go unchecked.**
- **Or, he can do so by tempting a church to not forgive and welcome a repentant person.**
- **Failure to forgive repentant people is in line with Satan's schemes.**
- **Withholding forgiveness is Satanic.**

**David Garland: "Satan's realm is one where immorality, the thirst for revenge, ruthlessness, heartlessness, and deadly rancor hold sway. Those who are in Christ have received God's free pardon, and they are transferred into a realm where faith, hope, love, and tender mercies rule. Satan is powerless before a united community filled with love and humble forgiveness. Satan's goal is always to foil God's work of reconciliation. Paul's concluding greetings in Rom 16:20, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet," may seem ironic—a God of peace crushing an enemy. But Satan is the enemy of peace. He is defeated by reconciliation. Christian love and charity neutralize all of Satan's powers over us and serves as an invisible, protective shield"**

**Forgiven people, forgive people.**

- **As an expression of comfort.**
- **As an expression of love.**
- **As a matter of obedience.**
- **As an act done before the approving Christ.**
- **As a means of thwarting Satan's plans.**

**Dane Ortlund: "When we turn and embrace in forgiveness a fallen, penitent brother, we are giving him a touch of heaven. This is who God is. And as we do so, we do not give a fresh pep talk. We do not scold or wag a finger, even subtly. To the penitent such a response is counterproductive. We simply embrace. For we ourselves have fallen, ad thousand different ways in our short life, and have needed the embrace of God in Christ toward us. 'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph 4:32)'"**

**We have experienced the unimaginable in Jesus Christ — full atonement; complete forgiveness through his saving work.**

**Forgiven people, forgive people.**

**People have have received grace, give grace.**