

“THE IMPACT OF AN UNFORGIVING SPIRIT”

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

Theme: Forgiveness is the best impression of God a believer can make.

Introduction: An old saying declares: “To err is human, but to forgive divine!” Forgiveness is an obligation of anyone who would be godly. It is one of the greatest attributes we appreciate about God. Can you imagine what it would be like to have a god that does not forgive? Forgiveness, then, is a basic Christian virtue. An unforgiving spirit is therefore a poison – a cancer that eats away at the soul of an offended party. Part of the reason it is so damaging is that the refusal to forgive drives a wedge between the offended one and God. Holding on to offenses also deprives a person of grace and causes the erosion of their emotional health – migrating for anger to resentment, to bitterness, and hostility. During this migration, it produces physical deterioration as well – such as increased blood pressure, suppression of the immune system, and an increased risk of heart disease. It has been said that bitterness is like you drinking poison and hoping the hated person dies.

I. The Collective Sorrow for Sin – 2:5

A. The Reason for Sorrow

1. We recall that prior to the lamented letter, Paul had traveled to Corinth to address an issue and was confronted with such controversy and opposition that he left the city defeated and discouraged – cp. 2 Corinthians 13:2.
2. It was because of this hostility and discouragement that he wrote the Lamented Letter that was confrontational and harsh – v. 4.
3. Now Paul references what had happened when he was rejected by a faction of the church led by a man who is described as causing sorrow – **“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.”**
4. Here, Paul states that he refused to take the opposition he had met personally – processing it as a more significant problem for the church.
5. The result is that when he wrote to them, the Spirit of God brought conviction, and most of them repudiated the faction, including the ring leader who had caused the controversy.

B. The Response to Sin

1. Apparently, not all of them agreed – hence, he says **“... in some**

degree ... to all of you” – meaning there were those who did not yield to his correction.

2. However, the vast majority had responded properly and were grieved over both their tolerance of the sin and now, at the sin of the sinner.
3. **“Sorrow” [ΛΥΠΕΩ]** – means to know severe emotional distress or sadness, to be grieved or vexed.
4. The sin of the rebellious had driven a wedge between people in the congregation – some siding with Paul and others siding with the antagonist.
5. This is the appropriate response to sin – the congregation ought to grieve when sin exists, and it is not confessed – cp. **2 Corinthians 7:8-9**.

II. **The Collective Sanction of a Sinner** – **2:6**

A. **The Severity of the Punishment**

1. In response to Paul’s correction and confrontation, the church had responded by holding the sinning brother accountable.
2. Paul states: **“Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority.”**
3. **“punishment” [ἔπιτιμία]** – is a term used nowhere else in the Scripture and means to “official disciplinary action” and in the context of the church would mean excommunication or “disfellowshipping.”
 - a) *It is the consequence Jesus advocated in **Matthew 18:15-18**.*
 - b) *It is also what Paul had instructed the church in Corinth to do with the immoral man in **1 Corinthians 5:4-5, 11**.*
 - c) *It is finally what Paul told the Thessalonians to do with a brother who leads an unruly life – cp. **2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15**.*
4. They had handled the problem of a defiant, sinful brother exactly as the Scriptures instructed.

B. **The Sufficiency of the Penitence**

1. Here we are informed that it had its desired effect of restoring the brother – **“Sufficient for such a one is this punishment ...”**
2. **“sufficient” [ἰκανός]** – means to “meet a standard” or “competent” and indicates that it produced the desired end.

3. There was no longer a need to hold the man at arm's length – enough had happened and he was repentant and therefore the discipline should end.

III. The Collective Sentiment Toward the Sorrowful – 2:7-10

A. The Concern for Restoration – v. 7

1. **“punishment”** is not the goal; we are not merely attempting to exert vengeance against an adversary – cp. **Romans 12:17-19**.
2. When a sinner repents, Christians must be quick to forgive and restore – **“... so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him ...”**
 - a) **“forgive”** [χαρίζομαι] – means “to give freely as a favor, give graciously, or “cancel a debt,” to “pardon” someone.
 - b) **“comfort”** [παρακαλέω] – to come to one's side to encourage or comfort him.
3. Apparently, some of those who were partial to Paul and sought to defend his honor were having a hard time trusting the sincerity of the men and did not want to let up on the punishment to restore him.
 - a) To refuse to forgive would be to cause the Lord to resist them – cp. **Matthew 6:14-15**.
 - b) It would also disqualify them from being able to worship – cp. **Matthew 5:23-24**.
4. The danger of being unrelenting in punishment is the undue oppression brought to the heart of the one who desires to be restored – **“... otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”**
5. The discipline had brought them to a place where they repented, and now desire to be reconciled and restored.
6. If they continue to be rejected, they might become **“overwhelmed”** [καταπίνω] – a term coming from the idea of “drinking down” or swallowing and can mean they would be devoured or swallowed up by their punishment.
7. **“excessive sorrow”** [περισσότερος] – refers to what is beyond a standard of abundance or what is far more than needed.

B. The Compassion is Reaffirmed – v. 8

1. There is an ability to display the very heart of God by forgiving

someone who repents – ***“Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”*** – cp. ***Ephesians 4:32.***

2. ***“reaffirm”*** [κυρώ] – means to validate or decide in favor of someone – to ratify the repentance as genuine to remove the blight of their sin from them.
3. Since they had publicly denounced and excommunicated him, they now needed to publicly embrace him and announce his restoration and reconciliation with the Body of Christ in Corinth.
4. Perhaps the greatest demonstration of Christian love is the act of forgiving someone and thereby rejoice in the efficacy of the work of Christ – cp. ***Ephesians 5:1-2.***

C. **The Confirmation of Remission – vv. 9-10**

1. The true test of their obedience – having been admonished to discipline the man for his outrageous rebellion – was whether they would be willing to forgive him now.
2. Paul declares: ***“For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things.”***
3. They had proven obedient in disciplining the man, they now had the opportunity to prove their obedience by doing what is even more difficult – restoring someone who has offended you.
4. Paul tells them that he is united with them as they do the right thing – ***“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.”***
5. Being willing to forgive the offender would confirm two things: 1) Their godly spirit as God is the great forgiver, and 2) the restoration of the brother – confirming for him that he is indeed forgiven – cp. ***Matthew 18:18.***

IV. **The Collective Stand against Satan – 2:11**

A. **The Resistance of the Accuser**

1. Satan is the consummate opportunist seeking to take advantage of the smallest deviation from God’s ways to leverage it in separating us from God.
2. The essence of resisting the devil is to draw near to God – cp. James 4:7.
3. In forgiving others, we close the door on the opportunity for the

devil – “... *so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan* ...”

4. “*advantage*” [ΠΛΕΟΝΕΚΤΕΩ] – refers to exploitation or the multiplying the damage.

B. The Realization of the Accusations

1. Satan is called the “accuser of the brethren” – *Revelation 12:10*.
2. In this sense, we know that to stir up animosity between believers is a way to discredit the truth of the gospel – “... *for we are not ignorant of his schemes.*”
3. We are to understand that Satan is constantly seeking to devour, divide, and discourage saints.
4. Hence, we are able to promote the glory of God’s grace by forgiving as we have been forgiven, and at the same time foil the scheme of dividing believers by reconciling through Christ.