

**The Church as a Fellowship of Forgiveness**  
**2 Corinthians 2:5-11**  
**1/25/26**

**Opening Prayer**

**Personal & Cornerstone Intro**

**Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11**

**Introduction:**

Last year, we went through the book of 1 Corinthians, and I think we could all agree that it was a book that pulls no punches! Corinth was a messy church, and Paul had much to write to them about. But what I love to see is that despite all the messiness of the Corinthian Church, in light of Paul's rebukes, they made changes. They heard the apostolic instruction—it surely cut them to the heart—and then they took steps to be doers of it.

Specifically, if you remember back to 1 Corinthians 5, there was a case of a man committing a grievous sin of sexual immorality (“immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles”, 5:1). In light of this, the Apostle called upon the church to exercise church discipline. They were to follow the instruction of Christ in Matthew 18, and “the one who had done this deed [should] be removed from [their] midst” (5:2). So, through the letter of 1 Corinthians, this church was instructed about the need to deal with sin within the congregation.

And to the Corinthians' credit, they followed through!

Now, there are differing opinions on whether or not the sexually immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5 is also the same man being discussed in 2 Corinthians 2. Some think that the man referred to in 2 Corinthians 2 is an opponent of Paul. But, as Pastor John Marc said back in his sermon on 1 Corinthians 5, there is reason to believe that the man in 2 Corinthians 2 is the same person being spoken of in 1 Corinthians 5. But, in either case, we learn through our passage this morning that the Corinthians had learned to faithfully carry out church discipline and deal with sin. And we learn that this church discipline process had brought the sinner to repentance.

And let's just take a moment to recognize God's grace working in this immature church. They weren't perfect, but they were truly growing in faithfulness and holiness!

However, there was still more growth to be had. Since the sinner had been brought to sorrow and repentance over their sin, another test was now in store. While they had learned the importance

Steven Schouten, Cornerstone Community Church

of confronting and dealing with sin and passed that test, another test was in store. Paul is now instructing them on the importance of not only confronting sin but also forgiving it.

I've titled this message "The Church as a Fellowship of Forgiveness" because forgiveness is the main theme of this passage.

**Main point:** 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 teaches three essential truths about forgiveness so that we may all experience the blessings that come with faithfully and graciously handling sin.

**Outline:**

- I. Forgiveness Restores the Repentant (2:5-8)
- II. Forgiveness Tests Obedience (2:9)
- III. Forgiveness Guards Against Satan (2:10-11)

**Prayer:** It is my prayer that we would be a church that will be "obedient in all things," like Paul says in 2:9. Meaning that we would be a congregation that faithfully confronts and deals with sin (on a personal and congregational level if necessary), but also graciously forgive/comfort/restore the repentant. May God help us all to walk in truth and love...

So, let's begin by looking at the first essential truth about forgiveness we learn in this passage from 2:5-8: Forgiveness Restores the Repentant.

"2:5-6"

**I. Forgiveness Restores the Repentant (2:5-8)**

So, as I mentioned earlier, Paul is speaking to the Corinthians of an individual who has sinned grievously enough that it required formal church discipline. But before fully moving on to the disciplinary aspect of these verses and the eventual call to forgiveness, there is something I want to point out in v. 5. I just want us to briefly notice how Paul describes the effect of this person's sin. He says that it "caused sorrow." Other versions render it as "grief" (NKJV) or "pain" (ESV).

Slow down for a second and think about that... Sin causes sorrow. Sin causes grief. Sin causes pain. Sin is ugly. Sin is nasty. Sin is wicked. Sin destroys.

Look again at v.5. It says that this man's sin had "caused sorrow" to "all of [the Corinthians]." In our individualistic age, we may be prone to thinking that our sin only affects us. However, we learn here that unrepentant sin brings sorrow, grief, and pain to the totality of the body of Christ. Do not be deceived; persistent and unrepentant sin will bring about damage to the body. Therefore, let us fear it and flee from it.

But, with that said, the focus on this passage now is going to be on the fact that, despite the pain and damage sin brings, it can be fully forgiven if it is repented of. And that is exactly what happened in this case here. While acknowledging the grief this man's sin caused, Paul wants the Corinthians to know that the church discipline process has fulfilled its intended purpose.

“2:6”

This “punishment” that the Apostle speaks of here refers to the official administering of church discipline upon this individual. The word is a Greek term that is only used here in the NT, but was used in that day describe the official imposing of “legal penalties” (Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, TNTC, 82). This verse states that the church came together and the “majority” inflicted the official/formal judgment of church discipline against this man.

I believe that they went through the Matthew 18 process, and the man until then had remained unrepentant, so they took the final step and officially excommunicated him, handed him over to Satan, and treated him as an unbeliever. And the context of this passage demonstrates that, through the action of church discipline and the pain of being removed from the church, this man was eventually convicted of his sin and brought to repentance.

And let me just state that this is the primary purpose of church discipline.

The main text on church discipline is Matthew 18, which we had as our Scripture reading this morning. Jesus explains that we are to follow the following steps:

1. Private confrontation
2. Confronting with one or two others
3. Tell it to the church
4. If they don't repent, then you treat them as an unbeliever.

But all of this is done not to be cruel/harsh/mean. Rather, one of its key purposes is to restore straying and unrepentant church members! Jesus says in Matthew 18:15 that the purpose is to “win your brother.”

Church discipline is about winning people back from the dangers of sin! It'd be really easy to just let people go their own way. But love doesn't do that. Love cares about people enough to go after them when they are walking on the path of destruction and call them back to the path of life

Let me illustrate this to you this way...

When I went down to The Master's Seminary a couple of years ago, I couldn't bring my dog, Kip, so the McDaniels graciously offered to take him. And right now, they are out of town, so my grandfather-in-law is staying over at the house. And just this past Friday, Kip decided that he

Steven Schouten, Cornerstone Community Church

wanted to escape from the yard. It's evening, and my grandfather-in-law notices that Kip is nowhere to be found.

Now, what do you do in this situation? I guess you could sit around and wait for the dog to come back. But if you really care about your dog, you are probably going to go look for him. And that's what granddad did.

By this time, it's dark out, but he got his flashlight and got in the car to track down Kip. (And my grandfather-in-law is a retired sheriff deputy and a Marine, so this dog was getting found whether he wanted to or not!) And, sure enough, he found him!

Since granddad cared about my dog, when he noticed he was not in the yard and was gone doing his own thing, he went after him. Even when it was dark, cold, and inconvenient. He cared enough to go after him.

And I share that story b/c that's what the church discipline process is kinda like. When we notice people are straying in grievous unrepentant sin, we care enough about them to go after them and address it, pray for their repentance. Church discipline is an action of love. It is for the good of the sinner! The entire process is aimed at restoring a straying church member to the Lord and to the church body...

But look again at v.6. What is the word that Paul says here to describe the punishment of the discipline process they had inflicted on this man? It says it was "sufficient." Paul says they were faithful to walk through Matthew 18, and that it led to this man's repentance. And b/c of that, it is "sufficient." Meaning, the punishment of church discipline was to cease. It was enough. No further discipline was needed.

Rather, it was time to administer something else.  
"2:6-8"

Here, Paul calls the saints at Corinth to "forgive" this man. They needed to fully forgive this man, despite the severe sin that had been committed. The time for discipline had passed, and the time for forgiveness and restoration had come. One commentator writes that the term translated "forgiveness" here has "the idea of giving something graciously or freely as a favor, to cancel a debt, or as here, to be gracious by forgiving someone for a wrong committed" (Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT, 134). The Corinthians, and we, are called to graciously cancel the debt of offense when someone repents.

Furthermore, if you look at vs.7-8, Paul also says that the Corinthians were to "comfort" this man and "reaffirm their love" for him. This word "comfort" means "to come alongside," "to

strengthen,” or “to encourage” (MacArthur, *2 Corinthians*, MNTC, 58). And the only other time the term “reaffirm” is used in the NT is in Galatians 3:15 where it speaks of “formally ratifying a covenant” (Ibid). Paul is urging the Corinthians to come alongside this man, encourage him, and reaffirm their covenant love for him in Christ. This is what was needed in this situation.

I want you to put yourself in the shoes of this individual... Imagine foolishly getting ensnared in wicked sin to the point where you are kicked out of the church. You have acted like an unbeliever. You were removed from the fellowship that you once loved. But most of all, you have grieved the very heart of God of your rampant and unrepentant immorality...

But, by God’s grace, the Lord leads you to repentance. And you now are to go back to the church you were excommunicated by with your tail between your legs... Imagine how you would feel.

You’d probably wonder if these people would ever love you again after all you had done. You’d probably wonder if the situation could ever be restored... And this is why the Apostle emphasizes to the church the need to “forgive” and “comfort” this man and “urges” them to “reaffirm their love” for him.

Paul says in v.7 that if they fail to do this, this individual “might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” His head might begin to drop beneath the waves of despair. To keep someone from drowning in a sea of sorrow, we must reach out a hand of forgiveness, comfort, and love and pull him out! We must reach out to repentant sinners in love and let them know, without a shadow of a doubt, that they are forgiven and restored!

This is what the Corinthians needed to do with this man, and this is what we must do if we are ever in a similar situation as well.

On a personal level, when somebody has sinned against you, but they repent, we must forgive them, but it can’t just end there! We should strive to make them know they are forgiven. Sometimes we may say the words “I forgive you,” but our actions tell a different story. May that never be.

Because these are gospel moments. How we handle these situations teaches people what God is like.

Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” In the same way that God has graciously forgiven us of our sins, we, in turn, offer full and complete forgiveness.

Steven Schouten, Cornerstone Community Church

We are all sinners who are not deserving of forgiveness. But the gospel is that God promises to forgive guilty people if they repent of their sins and place their faith in the perfect life and atoning death of Jesus Christ. That is true for any of you in here who have not yet come to Christ. In Christ, God promises to forgive you of all your sin! So come to Him!

But the believers here, we can minister to others who have repented of their sins by saying that we, too, have sinned and failed, but God has forgiven us. We can remind them that they are forgiven and loved by God, and so too are they forgiven and fully loved by us.

We should promise them that in the same way that God chooses to dwell on our sins no longer, neither will we dwell upon theirs. In the same way that God does not use our former sins against us, neither will we weaponize their sins against them. In the way that God is not like Satan, who is the “accuser of the brethren” and continually speaks of our sins, neither should we gossip about their sins. In the same way that God does not let our former sins remain a barrier between Him and us, neither will we let their former sins remain a barrier between them and us...

Let us take the initiative to reach out to the repentant, and let them know that their sin has not changed our love for them.

The essential truth that we learn in these verses is that through this act of forgiveness, comfort, and reaffirmation of love, the circle of reconciliation is complete and the repentant are restored...

But this is not the only truth about forgiveness that we learn in this passage.

In v. 9, we come to our next point and truth about forgiveness: Forgiveness Tests Obedience. “2:9”

## **II. Forgiveness Tests Obedience (2:9)**

Paul states that the purpose behind writing these letters was to see if the Corinthians would be faithful. He refers to these letters as being like a test. It is as if the Corinthians were gathered in a classroom, with Professor Paul walking through the room and passing out an exam with numerous questions. As the Apostle, he is speaking on behalf of Christ and informing these believers on how they are to live. Each address is a test question. Will they listen & obey? Or will they disregard & disobey?

Furthermore, look at v.9, he states that he wants to see whether they “are obedient *in all things*.” Not just some things. But *all* things.

Earlier, Paul had called on the Corinthians to exercise church discipline against the then-unrepentant sinner. Did they pass that test? Yes, they did.

But now, Paul is issuing another test. They had been faithful to carry out the hard but necessary process of discipline. They were faithful in that regard. But this call to forgiveness would put to the test whether they would be “obedient in all things.” Would they faithfully forgive this individual now that he had repented of his sin? That question remained to be answered...

While this verse is speaking to a specific situation in time and history, it has been preserved in holy Scripture for our benefit and confronts us with this principle: Forgiveness Tests Obedience. Whether we will forgive the repentant is a test of our commitment to the lordship of Jesus. To refuse to forgive is to disobey Christ.

Listen closely & soberly to these words of Christ:

Luke 17:3-4, “Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

Even if people continually sin against us, if they are truly repentant, then we must continually forgive them. See, forgiveness is not a take-it-or-leave-it option. It is a command from Scripture. Jesus and the Apostles proclaim that it is something we *must* do.

Matthew 6:14-15 - “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. “But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

Wow... Did you hear what Jesus said there? He said if we don't forgive others, then God won't forgive us. The reality is that forgiven people forgive. And if we forever remain in hardened unforgiveness toward someone who has repented, then that demonstrates that when you stand before the Lord, you will not be forgiven. You are showing yourself to not truly know Christ.

Now, I know that there may be people in here who have had unimaginably wicked things done to them. And it may be so hard to truly forgive from the heart. But if someone truly repents, there is no option. We must extend forgiveness. And we can do that by remembering the depth of our sin against Christ, but how He has forgiven us...

So, here in this verse, Paul is laying out a test to see whether or not the Corinthians would be obedient and extend forgiveness to this repentant sinner. And this same test of obedience applies to us. Will we be faithful and obedient followers of Christ?

By looking to the cross, I pray that we all will bow the knee to the lordship of Christ and be obedient to forgive....

With that said, we now come to the final essential truth about forgiveness in the final two verses of our passage: Forgiveness Guards Against Satan.

“2:10-11”

### **III. Forgiveness Guards Against Satan (2:10-11)**

In v.10, Paul begins by speaking about the unity and solidarity between himself and the Corinthian church. He says the “one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also.” As the founding pastor of this congregation and fellow brother in Christ, Paul states that if the Corinthian church grants forgiveness to anybody, he supports their decision and he forgives that person as well. This statement highlights the unity that exists between the body of Christ. When the Corinthians forgive, it is as if, from a distance, Paul is right there with them in spirit also forgiving.

But after this in v.10, Paul reverses it and says, “for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes.” Meaning (I think), on the flip side, Paul has forgiven the person and he is doing it for the sake of the Corinthians or on behalf of the Corinthians sake as well (Ortlund, “2 Corinthians,” in *Romans–Galatians*, ESVEC, 428).

These verses are really interesting. In them I think we are seeing the unity between Paul and the Corinthians, but we are also seeing the wise pastoral leadership of the Apostle.

Do you see what he is doing here?

1) He is serving as a leader in forgiveness. He is serving as an example to the church by saying that he has forgiven this man.

Furthermore, to lead the Corinthians to forgive the man, he even inserts this interesting phrase “if I have forgiven anything.”

One commentator writes, “We note Paul’s pastoral diplomacy [here]... Paul is not having trouble remembering what he has forgiven but is nobly downplaying the offense against him in light of the offender’s penitence” (Ibid).

2) But he is also encouraging the Corinthians to grow and make their own decisions. He places the burden of responsibility on them. He is saying that they need to make their own call about who has truly repented and should be forgiven and accepted back. And he encourages them by saying he trusts their judgment and that it is as if he were right there, standing in agreement with their decision...

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Paul is wisely both instructing and leading, while also encouraging growth by making them take responsibility and make decisions on their own. This is a helpful paradigm for disciples to follow in...

V.10 is really about the unity that should be behind this decision to forgive the repentant man... And this is vitally important. But perhaps for an unexpected reason... Look at v.11. "2:11."

Paul's call for unity in forgiveness in v.10 is needed b/c if they did not come together on this matter, Satan stood lurking to take advantage of them. Paul warns that if they failed to come together in a unified manner to forgive this repentant man, then Satan was setting up his attack.

Listen to what this verse is saying. Scripture is saying that unforgiveness and disunity give an opportunity for Satan to cause destruction within the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul calls upon the Corinthians, and us, to "not be ignorant of [Satan's] schemes." Now, I'm sure if you are a Christian, you know that the devil exists. I'm sure if I can give you a true/false question about whether Satan exists, you would all pass. However, I think that while we can intellectually accept this fact, we can functionally live as if we don't believe it.

Brothers and sisters, let me remind you: the spiritual realm is real. Satanic and demonic activity is real. Yes, Satan is only one being, and he is not omnipresent or omnipotent or equal with God in any way. But he is real. And Scripture does call him the god of this world. And he does lead a whole angelic hosts of fallen angels. And they are all dead set against God and His people. Satan hates the church of Christ. Satan hates Cornerstone Community Church.

Listen: Satan hates Christ. Satan hates the church. Satan hates Cornerstone Community Church. Satan hates us. And he does rage and do what he can to oppose the church. And the only reason demonic forces won't be opposed to us is if we are a dead church and complete non-factors.

But if we cause him trouble (which I pray to the Lord that we are a church that truly is warring against powers, principalities, and the kingdom of darkness!), then we must know that Satan will scheme against us!

1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." We have a real enemy...

Think about this term schemes" here in v. 11. It reminds me of my football days.

Steven Schouten, Cornerstone Community Church

How my coaches and I would be watching film of our opponents and just looking for their weaknesses. Looking to see where they could be beat. We were game-planning and trying to gain an advantage against them so we could beat them. Satan is like that! He is scheming. He is planning to see how he can take advantage of the church of Christ and do it damage.

Now, I do not share this with you to scare you. We are not to be paralyzed in fear. Satan is no match for our God. With the Lord, we have all that we need to stand against the devil. But I do share this to make us aware and sober-minded.

I want us to realize that if you and I allow unforgiveness and disunity to fester, then we are acting like the devil's doorman. You know what a doorman is? That guy dressed nicely outside of fancy hotels who opens the door and welcomes guests in. You are acting like that for Satan if we do not forgive others or if we cause disunity within the body.

So, let me ask you:

Have you failed to extend forgiveness to anybody else here in this room?

Do you have unresolved conflict with somebody else that you are just letting stay that way?

Have you been doing anything that would divide the body here?

If you have, then I warn you: You are falling into the schemes of Satan. And I trust that is not your desire! I trust you want to live for the Lord! So, deal with these matters urgently.

Here today at church, before you leave, if you have unresolved conflict with someone, humbly go to them and hash it out. If you have refused somebody forgiveness, then repent and go extend forgiveness. If you have caused divisions, then repent, make amends, and promote unity from this day forth.

Whatever you do, let us leave today knowing that forgiveness is something that we must extend for many reasons, but one is that forgiveness guards against Satan...

### **Conclusion**

So, in this passage, we have seen multiple essential and important truths about forgiveness.

We have seen how:

Forgiveness Restores the Repentant

Forgiveness Tests Obedience

Forgiveness Guards Against Satan

And in this all, we have clearly seen that the Church is called to be a Fellowship of Forgiveness.

Steven Schouten, Cornerstone Community Church

This is rooted in the fact that we are first of all a Fellowship of the *Forgiven*. Meaning, we are people who have experienced the forgiveness of God through Christ.

This forgiveness did not come cheap. It came at the cost of the precious blood of Christ. The cross teaches us that God does not ignore our sinful rebellion against His holiness. But at the same time, the cross demonstrates the vast and marvelous mercy of God.

So, may God help us to reflect this in our lives and in this church. By His grace, may we be a people that are obedient to the lordship of Christ and thus faithfully deal with sin, and also freely extend forgiveness, comfort, and love to the repentant, because that is what Christ has done for us...

Closing Prayer