

## **A Fellowship of Forgiveness**

2 Corinthians 2:1 – 11

**Proposition:** A fellowship of forgiveness deals decisively with sin, desires restoration of a repentant believer and defeats the tactics of the evil one.

**Application:** PBC would be a fellowship of forgiveness.

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### **Introduction**

Imagine a car mechanic who only studied and talked about fuel pumps. Night and day, he examined them, read about them, talked about them, while neglecting the rest of the car parts. Fuel pumps would be all he mentioned to clients. Almost every repair would relate in some way to fuel pumps. A specialist mechanic of this kind would be inept due to his slanted focus on just one part of the car. Good mechanics have a well-rounded approach to their job which involves proper knowledge of and care of the whole car.

Here at PBC our approach to Scripture is to declare the whole counsel of God. The Lord does not want us to focus only on the positive parts of Scripture teaching while passing over the more difficult parts. Whatever Scripture says it is always profitable and useful for the building up of the body of Christ Jesus. We come to one of those passages that I would likely overlook if we did not adhere to the principle of declaring the whole counsel of God. This morning we are looking at the topic of a fellowship of forgiveness. My prayer is that PBC is and will always to be a fellowship of forgiveness. What does a fellowship of forgiveness look like? A fellowship of forgiveness deals decisively with sin. A fellowship of forgiveness desires restoration of a repentant believer and a fellowship of forgiveness defeats the work of the evil one.

## **A Fellowship of Forgiveness**

### **I. ...Deals with Sin (2:1 – 6)**

*Instead of a Painful Visit (2:1, 2):* The Corinthian congregation was a source of heart-ache for Paul. He cared deeply about what was going on in the churches that he planted.

For the Corinthians, Paul was experiencing what he termed in 11.28, *the daily pressure of ministry*.

Paul made at least three visits to the Corinth. He first went to there to plant the church on his second missionary journey. He remained in Corinth for about 1.5 years (cf., Acts 18).

After writing 1 Corinthians, Paul made a second short but painful visit. This visit was one of conflict and grief as he dealt with some messy issues in the young congregation.

His third visit was to take up an offering for the Jerusalem saints (13.1).

In this passage we encounter seven *pain* words. Sorrow is the anti-thesis to joy.

Philippians is known for its frequency of the word *joy*. 2 Corinthians is known for its frequency of the word *sorrow*. Philippians highlights the *joy of salvation*. 2 Corinthians highlights the *grief of sin*.

A few weeks ago, we learned that Paul changed his planned visits to Corinth which caused some to question his integrity. He changed his plans because he did not want to go to Corinth with a rod of correction. He had no desire to make another painful visit. So he chose to postpone his trip.

*I Wrote a Painful Letter* (2:3, 4a): The problem in Corinth caused deep seated sadness in the apostle. Rather than make a painful visit, he wrote a painful letter. While writing this letter, Paul was deeply distressed and full of anguish.

In this letter Paul brought a sin problem to their attention. The sin was serious because it affected the church's purity and her testimony. Paul urged the family of believers to deal with the sin.

*To Prove My Love for You* (2:4b, 5): The grief Paul experienced over the sin problem in Corinth was proof of his love for them. Grief is a love emotion. We do not grieve those whom we do not love.

**Read** Prov 27:6

We cannot know with 100% certainty the nature of the sin Paul refers to. Although at times Paul does name names and identify sin, naming names and specifying sins was not Paul's usual way of doing things. We will not attempt to identify the offence, or the offender involved. Rather we will seek to draw out timeless principles.

The timeless principle we gain from this passage is that a *fellowship of forgiveness deals decisively with sin.*

*And Urge You to Take Action (2:6):* Discipline is never painless both for the one who gives it and for the one who receives it. The goal of Paul's severe letter was to address the sinning member in the church.

The word *punishment* means *a fitting response to turn someone in the right direction.*

That is in fact why church discipline is needed. The goal of all church discipline is to help a sinning Christian “snap” out of their sinful lifestyle and come to their senses.

Not only does church discipline seek to turn someone in the right direction, it also serves to maintain church purity, it acts as a deterrent for other believers and it allows the church to continue to have an effective witness in the community.

The Lord Jesus laid out a three-step process *to turn someone in the right direction*.

**Read** Matt 18:15 – 17

*One Witness:* The desired outcome in each stage is always *repentance*. The process begins with a private one-on-one meeting. A believer who is a witness to the sin approaches the guilty person in a spirit of gentleness not in a spirit of judgmentalism, and calls attention to their sin. If they respond favourably and make right the wrong by repenting of their specific sin, the matter is settled. No further action is needed.

**Read** Gal 6:1

*Two Witnesses:* But if the offender refuses to repent, then another witness to the sin is brought in. I do not believe Jesus is saying we go find another mature believer and together try to win over the offender. Rather Jesus is referring to the rules of evidence.

Dealing with a sinning believer in the church has to be done with proper witnesses. For a guilty verdict to be valid and sin properly addressed the Torah required that it be supported by two or more witnesses.

**Read Deut 19:15**

Step-two in the process to *turn someone in the right direction* is take another mature believer in the church who is also a witness to the sin. Both witnesses approach the offender and in a spirit of gentleness and not in a spirit of condemnation, point out their sin and implore them to repent.

Should the sinning member repent the matter is settled, no further action is needed. But if he or she persists in sin, then the issue is brought before the congregation.



*A Majority Vote:* Based on what Jesus said in Matthew 18, there are times when a sinning believer must be brought before the congregation. That is what happened in the Corinthian Church. The word *majority* suggests there was some sort of congregational vote or consensus on the issue. Some may not have agreed with the action taken but the majority did.

Yet Paul severe letter worked. The Corinthian church dealt decisively with the sin issue and the person repented.

**Read** 2 Cor 7:8 – 10

**Transition:** A fellowship of forgiveness deals decisively with sin. A fellowship of forgiveness also desires restoration.

## **II. ...Desires Restoration (2:7 – 10)**

*Be Swift to Forgive and Comfort (2:7, 8):* C. S. Lewis once said, “*we all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it.*” Just as a surgeon wounds to heal so the church disciplines to restore. Restoring work is just as important as rebuking work.

Now it was time for the Corinthian congregation to forgive. It was time to welcome him back into the family. Not only should a church follow the instructions regarding discipline, it should also follow the instructions regarding restoration.

It seems the believers in Corinth had a hard time restoring the repentant brother. The church at first would not let him back into the fellowship.

Paul now instructs them to no longer hold the sin against this repentant Christian, instead they were to swiftly respond with forgiveness, comfort and love.

**Read** Luke 17:3, 4

Forgiven people forgive. In Christ Jesus we have received forgiveness and in Him we are to forgive others. The word for forgiveness in verse seven, has the sense of it being offered freely and graciously. The word suggests that since we are forgiven by grace then by that same grace, we forgive others. The question is never whether one deserves forgiveness, the issue is if one truly repents then we freely forgive.

Once repentance is expressed further discipline is prohibited. Paul says, “he has suffered enough for his offence now take him back!”

A prolonged exile from the family of believers may cause a repentant believer to drown in regret, shame and grief such that they may risk shipwreck their faith.

**Read** Ps 69:1, 2

**Illustration:** Everybody messes up. But sadly many churches in North American are tolerant toward sin and refuse to exercise church discipline toward an unrepentant believer. When a church finally does discipline and the repentant believer seeks restoration back into the fellowship, the church finds it difficult to forgive and restore. The NA church does not have a very good track record with respect to how we treat repentant Christians. It has been said that “the Christian army is the only army that shoots its wounded.”

Paul exhorts the Corinthian church with three action verbs: *forgive, comfort* and *love*.

*Restoration is a Matter of Obedience (2:9):* Restoration is not only for the benefit of the repentant believer it is also for the benefit of the church family. Just as Paul's severe letter tested their obedience with respect to exercising church discipline, his letter also tests their obedience with respect to restoring the repentant brother. Obedience to God's Word demands the hard work of church discipline, and also demands the hard work of restoration. Paul's command to *forgive, comfort* and *love* the repentant believer takes on the status of a *test* of faith.

**Transition:** A fellowship of forgiveness deals decisively with sin by disciplining the unrepentant believer. A fellowship of forgiveness also desires restoration by freely and unconditionally extending forgiveness, comfort and love to a truly repentant believer.

By obeying the Lord in these two matters a fellowship of forgiveness defeats the work of the evil one.

### **III. ...Defeats Evil (2:11)**

Satan may tempt a church community to treat sin with leniency, and he may tempt the church family to treat a repentant believer too harshly. When a church fails to deal decisively with sin or fails to restore a truly repentant believer, Satan gains a foothold to deceive the church, divide its members and destroy its witness in the community.

Dealing decisively with sin and extending forgiveness, comfort and love to a repentant believer closes the door to the schemes of the evil one and thwarts his purposes in our midst.

## **Conclusion**

Story of Prodigal Son.

A fellowship of forgiveness deals decisively with sin. A fellowship of forgiveness desires restoration by extending forgiveness, comfort and love toward a repentant believer. A fellowship of forgiveness defeats the work of the evil one. May PBC be a fellowship of forgiveness.