

Restoration to Fellowship for a Repentant Sinner

2 Corinthians 2

2 Corinthians 2: But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. 2 For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? 3 And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. 4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you. 5 But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. 6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. 9 For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, 11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices. 12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia. 14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? 17 For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ."

Background Notes

2 Corinthians 2 helps us fill in the gaps of Paul's communication and contact with the church at Corinth. As we mentioned in chapter 1, Paul may have written as many as four letters to the church at Corinth, and he may have made three visits to Corinth.

Verse 1: "*But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.*" We know that Paul did not come to Corinth in sorrow the first time, on his second missionary journey, when the church was founded. As we know, the letter of 2 Corinthians was written from Ephesus before Paul came to Corinth on his third journey (13:1). So Paul *may* have come over to Corinth from Ephesus for a quick disciplinary visit, a visit mentioned as the "painful" or "sorrowful" visit (v1).

The fact that this painful visit was Paul's second visit is seen in 2 Corinthians 12:14, where he speaks of his third visit: *"Now for the third time I am ready to come to you."* And 2 Corinthians 13:1 - *"This will be the third time I am coming to you."*

Soon after Paul's return to Ephesus from the "painful" visit, he wrote a sorrowful letter, mentioned in verses 3-4: *"And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears."* Most scholars and commentators believe this letter "written with many tears" was lost. They believe this letter was not the letter of 1 Corinthians, but a letter written after the painful visit.

Since the people who were trying to undermine Paul's apostolic authority accused the apostle of vacillation because he changed his plans, Paul gave the Corinthian believers the good reasons why he delayed his return to Corinth: *"Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia."*(v12-13)

So Paul stayed at Troas for a while, because the Lord opened the door for ministry there. He was hoping Titus would meet him there and bring news from Corinth, because Titus had carried the "sorrowful letter" to Corinth. After a time of ministry at Troas, Paul moved on to Macedonia where he met Titus. Titus brought news from Corinth, and that became the occasion for writing this letter known as 2 Corinthians. Paul followed up this letter with his final recorded visit, recorded in the first few verses of Acts 20.

Just for the record: the apostle Paul may have visited Corinth one more time between his two Roman imprisonments. Paul visited a number of places after release from his first Roman imprisonment, and these travels are sometimes called his fourth missionary journey. He may have made it to Corinth.

2 Timothy, Paul's last letter, was written from Paul's second Roman imprisonment after these travels. In 2 Timothy 4:20 Paul wrote: *"Erastus stayed in Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick."* When did Paul leave Erastus at Corinth? Was it when he visited Corinth on his third missionary journey, or was it on a possible fourth missionary journey? We don't know for sure, but Paul may have returned to Corinth at that time.

Doctrinal Points

1. Tough love includes sorrow.

What is "tough love"? When you love someone, but you have to do something that hurts, or is unpleasant, or involves discipline - and yet it's the *right* thing to do - that's *tough* love. Paul loved the Corinthian believers! He wanted the best for them, and he wanted to rejoice with them. But there was a specific problem at Corinth, and Paul had to deal with it. A

study of 1 Corinthians reveals that the Corinthian church had a number of problems, but we can't be completely sure which specific problem necessitated the painful visit and sorrowful letter referred to in verse 1.

The specific problem here involved the actions of a certain man in Corinth (v5-8). This may have been the man involved in sexual sin mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5, or it may have been some outspoken critic of Paul, perhaps a ringleader of the factions at Corinth. In any case, something had to be done about this problem, and it involved discipline - a painful visit and a sorrowful letter. This was tough love, and tough love involves sorrow.

This discipline involved sorrow for Paul and sorrow for the Corinthians (v1-4). Tough love always involves sorrow. In fact if there's no sorrow on the part of those who have to exercise discipline, then it may just be wrath or revenge, and not tough love at all.

In my twenty-eight years of college teaching, probably the hardest part of the job was having to be involved in the painful process of expelling students from school. For many and various reasons (including the good of the student) this sometimes had to be done. This was tough love, and it was painful and sorrowful, but tough love involves sorrow.

2. Tough love involves forgiveness.

There are two dangers in church discipline. Number 1 is that discipline is not carried out when it should be, and unjudged sin continues to exist in the church. The other danger is that there is no attitude of forgiveness on the part of those who had to impose the discipline. As a result, the healing process is limited - on the part of all concerned.

In the Corinthian case, the discipline had its intended effect. The man who had caused the problem - the man who was involved in sin - came to repentance. Titus brought this good news to Paul when they met in Macedonia. We don't know whether this was the man of 1 Corinthians 5 who was involved in sexual sin, or another individual who caused problems, but whoever it may have been, that person had repented. As a result, Paul told the Corinthians to forgive the repentant sinner, and to bring him back into the fellowship.

The time of discipline was over. The Corinthians had passed the test of imposing discipline for sin in the church, and the discipline had worked! It had its intended effect - repentance. Now it was the church's responsibility to show love and forgiveness by comforting the man and restoring him to fellowship.

Notice what Paul said would happen if they did not show love at this point: *"Lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices" (v11)*. If those who are exercising tough love are not willing to forgive, before long there will be no love with the discipline, but rather hate and revenge - and the church will split or break up. Tough love *must* involve forgiveness.

Practical Application

Don't "peddle" the Word of God!

Verses 14-17: *"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ."*

In these verses, Paul used the illustration of a Roman "Triumph." After the Roman army would win a major war, they would have a victory march and celebration in Rome called a "Triumph." The victorious general would lead the procession of conquering soldiers and also the captive prisoners, many of whom would be put to death. Fragrant incense would be burned along the way. To those who were the conquerors, the aroma of the incense was an aroma of life. To the captives who would die, it was an aroma of death.

In the analogy, Paul likened Jesus Christ to the victorious general, and he likened the fragrant incense to the message of Christ. To Paul and other true servants, the message of Christ was a fragrance of life. To the false apostles who were "peddling" the preaching of the Word of God, it was the aroma of death.

The false apostles who were undermining the ministry and Paul's apostolic authority were unbelievers (chapter 1). They were in the ministry for ulterior motives. They were manipulating Scripture for their own purposes. They were diluting the God's Word for their own agendas, and for their own gain. They were profiting from their preaching.

They were "peddling" the Word of God – as many preachers, and teachers, and TV evangelists do today. Don't be ensnared! And don't "peddle" the Word of God!