A close-up of a hand

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*2nd Cor. 12:9 “My strength is made perfect in weakness.”*

**The Forgiving Forgiven**

**Second Corinthians** was definitely not Paul’s 2nd letter to the Corinthian church. It was his third or later letter to this church that he had planted 3-4 years prior. (In his first letter he mentions a “previous letter”). It was written by Paul (and Timothy) from the location of Macedonia, (probably Thessalonica or Philippi) in about 56AD. Paul kept in touch with and exercised accountability over the churches he had planted through his letters.

In First Corinthians, he addressed several problems within the church including “tolerated sin”. This letter, which may have been written shortly after an actual visit by Paul to Corinth, refers to an upheaval within the Church there, in which Paul had been disparaged and his *apostolic authority* was being challenged.

Still he maintains a loving and compassionate attitude toward the church, and offers fatherly advice. He knows that they *suffer and struggle* there in Corinth, and he is aware that they have enemies both from the outside culture, and from within their own church body.

In the first chapter, he reminds them of the suffering they ***all*** must endure, but offers them comfort, and urges them to comfort each other as well.

**A map of greece and acropolis

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**Last week:**

**2nd Cor. 1:3** “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the “Father of compassion” and the “God of all comfort”,

Paul began this letter describing God as; *“the Father of Compassion” and “God of all comfort”.* These beautiful titles show the heart of God’s love for us, and the wealth of *compassion and comfort* that we can find in Him not only for ourselves, but also so we can share it with others.

**2nd CORINTHIANS 2:1-4**

**“**So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. **2**For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? **3**I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. **4**For *I wrote you* out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.”

I am not sure we emphasize enough how much Paul loved the people of the churches he planted, and wrote his epistles to. Throughout his letters, amidst his many teachings, corrections, and admonishments, he repeatedly reminds them of his love for them, and urges them to love one another. He is undoubtedly responding to Jesus’ emphatic teachings to His disciples to “love one another”. He gave them a new commandment “to love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34), and stated that the proof of their discipleship was demonstrated in their love for one another.

***John 13:34***“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. **35**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Paul had given up everything he had on earth for the sake of the gospel. He went from being a highly educated, accomplished and revered Pharisee who was an upper-echelon leader in the influential communities of both Antioch, and Jerusalem, to one who was beaten, maligned, jailed, and often-times destitute for preaching the gospel to the cities whose names are mentioned in his epistles; Corinth, Philippi, Colossae, etc.

In his writings, he expresses deep love and affection for the people in these churches;

* “I will gladly spend and be *spent for you*.” (2nd Cor. 12:15)
* “I thank my God upon every *remembrance of you*.” (Philippians 1:3)
* “I give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *praying always for you*.” (Colossians 1:3)
* “I *do not cease giving thanks for you*, while making mention of you in my prayers.” (Ephesians 1:15-16)
* “For God is my witness, how *I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 1:8)

He loved the churches as a Father loves his children, and with that love comes the responsibility to correct and admonish. In 1st Corinthians, he rebuked them for not only tolerating but being “proud” to tolerate a gross sin that was taking place within the church body.

***1st Corinthians 5:3*** “For my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgment in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this.”

In response they disciplined this man and he presumably repented. The goal for discipline and even punishment is not condemnation and banishment, it is always forgiveness and restoration. This was apparently not taking place, in Corinth so Paul had to correct them for this as well. He offers them this exhortation;

**2nd Cor. 2:5-8**“If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. **7**Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. **8**I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your *love for him*.”

Paul was concerned that this person would be “overcome with excessive sorrow”, so he urged them to forgive and comfort the brother, and reaffirm their love for him.

This is a mistake that many churches make. They have a short list of unforgivable sins, that even if a person repents with godly sorrow and; “Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.” (Matt. 3:8), they are shunned and never restored into fellowship with the body. *(This is not about titles and positions, those are conditional, but fellowship and restoration of relationship should always be available to a fallen brother or sister.)*

***Galatians 6:1-2*** “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. **2**Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

“You who live by the Spirit” means those who are spiritual and display the fruits of the Spirit. “Love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, meekness, goodness, and self-control. Those who don’t live this way should certainly NOT be part of the “restoration committee”. They will do more harm than good, and likely be tempted into other sin in the process.

*Carrying each other’s burdens,* is not just being concerned for other people’s physical, and material needs, it’s sharing a genuine burden for their spiritual needs as well.

**2nd Cor. 2:9-11“**Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. **10**Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, **11**in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”

We should be called “The Forgiving Forgiven”. In other words, we are forgiven people who also forgive others. This is a very important part of Jesus’ teaching and also part of the Lord’s prayer.

***Matt. 6:12-13*** “forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors…”

Paul tells them; “Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, **11**in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”

The devil’s schemes are pretty simple “Divide and Conquer”. Any opportunity he finds to cause disunity to spread in the body, he eagerly fans the flames and pours gas on the fire. One area where he is especially effective is ‘unforgiveness’.

[Have you ever had a conflict with someone or been hurt by them, and carried unforgiveness and told a friend? Now both you *and* your friend (and whomever they tell), can carry bitterness and unforgiveness toward this person. But if you and your friend patch things up and reconcile, then everyone who carries unforgiveness toward this person is obligated to as well. Sometimes that happens, but sometimes it does not. The evil uses these types of situations to spread more bitterness, unforgiveness, and dissention and division. That’s why it’s so important to respond how Paul did;

*V. 10 “Anyone you forgive, I also forgive.”]*

**2nd Cor. 2:12-13**“Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, **13**I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.”

**A map of greece and acropolis

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Paul is referring to an incident where he was expecting to meet up with Titus in Troas, who had been to Corinth. He was hoping Titus would tell him that the Corinthians received his tough letter of correction and took it well, and had all repented and reconciled. He was uneasy because he was sensing some discord in the relationship with this church whom he truly loved. Titus was not in Troas so he left there and went to Macedonia, where he eventually connected with Titus, who comforted his anxiety. We can read a little more about it in chapter 7.

***2nd Cor. 7:5-7*** “For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. *But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us* by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also *by the comfort you had given him*. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.”

God comforted them with the comfort that they had given him. This is again how God’s comfort works as we saw in chapter 1. He comforts us, and we comfort each other.

**2nd Cor. 2:14-17**“But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ’s triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. 15 Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. 16 To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this? **17**Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.”<>

Paul ends the chapter using the example a prisoner procession, a celebration that was marked with music and incense aroma throughout the ancient world.

We are like prisoners of Christ and he leads us where he wants. We are also a fragrance of life to God and to those who sense eternal life but not to those who do not know the life of God.

Those who are perishing and have no knowledge of the truth, cannot understand the truth about Jesus, and message of the Cross. In their lostness they are blinded to these things, and in fact find them detestable or foolish.

***1st Corinthians 1:18*“**For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

*[TV debate with a conservative Jewish man and an angry trans guy berating him, (irate, furious, enraged, unhinged, hateful) ]*

I wonder what I would do if I was faced with the same type of unbridled animus railing against me. ( *Hold up a cross, like in the exorcist?).*

The only thing we can do is speak truth in the face of a barrage of lies, even if the hearer cannot understand or will not receive.

The sad truth is that most of the world “is perishing” and finds the message of the cross to be foolish as we see in 1st Cor.1:18. They are perishing because they face judgement and eternal death if they continue to ignore the cross, and reject God.

***Romans 2:5*** “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”

The only hope our world has to escape God’s wrath is to accept the salvation that is made available by Jesus’ blood. This why it is so important that we are sent by God to speak the truth about His word and His love even to a sinful generation that openly rejects Him.

*[someone on a sinking boat, needs to come onboard a rescue vessel, not just be thrown supplies and a life preserver.]*

*A person drowning in sin and lostness desperately needs the redemption and salvation that comes only through the cross.*

***Romans 5:8-9* “**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from *God’s wrath* through him!”

***Romans 6:23* “**For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

This is the message that will save the world. It’s only through the cross of Jesus, and His sacrifice for our sins, that we can have forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation with our heavenly Father who *wills none to perish but all to come to repentance.*

***John 5:24*** “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has *eternal life* and will *not be judged* but has crossed over from death to life.” (Jesus)

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