

“Connected in Restoration”

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

September 3, 2017

We turn our attention to the Second Corinthians 2 this morning as we continue to think about being connected to serve. Last week we saw how the Lord uses our suffering as the theater for revealing his comforting character in our lives. He never wastes our difficulties and suffering. Instead, he opens our eyes to see his loving presence with us in the midst of our pain.

Today, we look at one source of pain: conflict in the church. Paul was on his way to Macedonia, and the route would take him through Corinth. He planned to stop in Corinth to visit the church both going and coming. The stop on the way to Macedonia, however, went extremely poorly. He called it the “painful visit” in v. 1. Apparently, there were some outside teachers who had come and began to challenge Paul’s authority and had gained a foothold in the church; a faction from within the church began to oppose Paul publicly and stir the church up against him.

So instead of going straight to Macedonia, he stopped off in Ephesus and wrote a severe letter of rebuke, vs 3-4 suggest. This letter that Titus carried to Corinth is lost. But it did its work, for Titus returned with the news that his severe letter led a majority of the church to repentance (chapter 7). Paul wrote this letter in response to the repentance of the church.

So what we read today is how we are connected in conflict and how we handle it. Instead of taking a ringside seat—as the world might, the Lord calls us to take an active role to forgive and restore.

⁵ Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. ⁶ For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, ⁷ so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. ⁹ For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. ¹⁰ Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

We’ve all heard it before and when we were small we completely disbelieved it. What does Dad say when he disciplines a child? “This is going to hurt me more than it does you.” As a kid, we thought, “Yeah, right.” On this side, we understand what Dads all over mean when they say it.

Conflict, pain, discipline hurt. Not only the one on the receiving end, but on the giving end, too. That hurt is a context for growth, as individuals and as a body—any growth comes through difficulty and pain. What are things we can learn and ways we can grow through conflict?

1. We are connected.

V. 5, Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. Paul’s anguish is shared in the body. When he hurts, they hurt. And when they hurt, he hurts. When there is the presence of unchecked sin in the body, the entire body is affected by it. We don’t belong to ourselves any longer. We belong to the Lord, and therefore, to one another.

Specifically to what Paul addresses, when we attack one another, we harm the body. And as members of that body we all suffer. In his earlier letter, 1 Corinthians 12, he proclaimed that when one part of the body suffers, the whole suffers, including each part. He will say the same thing in chapter 11. The illustration he uses is that of a physical body. When one part of it is injured, it affects the whole body. We know exactly what he means when we talk about our bodies, don’t we?

I ate something last weekend that I was allergic to and my stomach felt it...for days. We know when we have tummy trouble, lots of other things are affected, too. I didn’t have the energy to do what I needed to get done; all I could manage was laying down; and ask my family if this affected my mood! Who knew intense grumpiness is a side affect of food allergy. But we know, don’t we? When one part of the body is injured, the whole suffers.

The same is true in our connected body God calls the church. We are not a country club of association. The church is an eternal community—bound together for the rest of eternity—and further dependent upon one another in order to grow together. What the Bible teaches us—married and unmarried folks—is that it is not marriage that is the eternal community; we tend to look to marriage in our culture for that blessing. Rather, It is the church. The ultimate place where human relationships address our loneliness and longings. The church, the real connection of believers to one another, is the new humanity that God is producing in this world. We truly are connected to one another, joined together.

Specifically the sins Paul addresses here: when we slander, sow discord, pass along half-baked or information that is not **verifiably** true, or without information judge another's motives, even when innocently trying to cover your tracks (“I’m just sayin’”, or “I only repeat what I’m told”). You hurt the whole body, including yourself. We hurt together when we hurt one another. When a person passes along information, then, our primary filter in determining whether to share or pass along should be this: **does this help the body in connection, belonging and grow in mutual love?** If not, don’t say it; don’t repeat it!

This is one gift we have to offer the world to serve them: live as a people who are consciously serving one another in how we live together and talk about one another. What a contrast to the “eat one another alive” tactics of the gotcha game played all around us. We are connected into an eternal community that has already begun: when one hurts, the whole hurts.

2. In the Body, truth and grace go together.

Or to borrow a phrase from our interim pastor Bob Hopper, the church is a place of High Truth and High Grace, as Paul lays out here.

The circumstances Paul speaks to here arise from a person who was sowing seeds of discord in the body. This public and destructive sin had to be labeled as such. That, apparently, was the content of the lost letter he mentions in v. 4 and v. 9. The Apostle held up the light of God’s word to truthfully confront a person harming the body. There was some sort of church discipline, that is, the church, **majority, v. 6**, who held this person accountable for their actions. They put him out of the fellowship. That may seem primitive and harsh to our modern ears. And yet, in the body of Christ, we are to be held accountable for our sin. We are accountable to the Word of God, and flagrant and public sins need to be called as such. For any of us who claim the name of belonging to Jesus yet deny him with our lifestyle that is not conforming to being his disciple, we must in high truth be willing to call one another to repentance—to turn away from our sin and toward the Christ who restores in grace.

We hold one another to accountability before Lord Jesus for a growing obedience to his truth. However, when it comes to *our own* sin and mistakes, we can be very good defense attorneys. We know how to spin the truth, let ourselves off the hook, presume excuses WHY we had to do what we did. It wasn’t so bad. We are VERY good defense attorneys for self.

But like the Corinthians, we are often very good prosecutors of everyone else’s sin. We are quick to accuse and slow to forgive. The propensity to refuse forgiveness and restoration of those who may have caused us pain or embarrassment is an age-old problem in the church, not merely a modern one. Further, this **stinginess with the grace of forgiveness and restoration** is toxic to a people of God whose standing rest always and ONLY on a grace received from the Lord. Now being a people of High Truth does not provide license to be a member of the Jerk for Jesus club. No Tantrums for the Truth.

Instead note how Paul responded to the one who sinned essentially against him, **v. 7? Forgive him! Reaffirm your love for him!** In other words, extend grace to this one who has repented. Don’t prosecute him any longer, but instead, offer the grace and restoration of forgiveness. Receive him back! Bear in mind this command is made to receive the one who repented back into fellowship. Repentance as we’ll see in a few weeks is not merely an offender saying, “Oops. Wish I hadn’t done that.” But it also involves by God’s grace, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, to endeavor after new obedience. By the Spirit’s power not to persist in the conduct that hurts the body.

Why? Because the body is not like the club we join. Instead, as one commentator writes, it is the family into which we are born again!¹ In this family that God has brought together, truth and grace go together. We call for truth in our community and extend grace to one another. The truth is that if they refused to forgive, and if we refuse to forgive and extend grace toward one another, then the poison of legalism threatens the body. Holding onto old wounds, old slights, old hurts is toxic to the whole body of Christ.

I wonder why it is hard for us to forgive and restore a repentant person sometimes. Not always, but sometimes it may be because we tend to judge in others most harshly what we find most detestable in our own hearts. That is the way shame works and keeps us under its thumb. If I see something in you that I kind of see in my although I don't WANT it to be there, then my judgment of that sin in you may tend toward harshness—because I'll feel better by comparison. So it is worth asking the question—am I unwilling to forgive another to some degree because I see that same sin in myself? If I find it difficult to forgive and restore one who struggles with lust, might it be I feel on the losing end of a battle with the same sin? Perhaps. Or gossip? Or uncontrolled anger?

I know that to be true in my own heart related to anger, especially if you ask my family. I can get all over my kids about inappropriate and disproportional anger. I mean I will let them have it...most likely because I see that same impatient anger in myself and I hate it in me. So I will hate it all the more in them—I'll **pass my pain on to them**, leading toward a lack of forgiveness and restoration when they repent. Or at least making sure they really feel how bad it was.

Paul's command, however, is **rather than passing pain on to one another in conflict or pain, pass forgiveness along**. Another way to say it if we have been forgiven, then turn and forgive others. **Forgiven People Forgive**. If our being forgiven by Jesus doesn't lead us to forgive, then we may legitimately wonder if we've truly grasped how much we've been forgiven in the first place.

Look again at v. 10. *Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ.* What Paul is saying is he was the one offended, and he forgave. If I have done it, so can you, v. 10, *in the presence of Christ*, or literally, *in the face of Christ*, or as *Jesus looks and is present here in approval and with us in his power. The presence of Christ is here by the Spirit, and he will empower us and strengthen us to be a community of truth and grace. That's his work!*

The word Paul uses here is not the usual word for forgiveness in the New Testament. Instead, we find a form of *charizomai*, which carries the sense of giving a gift. In other words, if you have received the gift of forgiveness, the cancelation of your debt of sin through the sacrifice of Jesus, then give the gift away to another who has harmed you.

I realize there are occasions, particularly in cases of abuse, that forgiveness may not look like re-engaging in relationship the same way. It is not loving to continue putting people into places where they can perpetuate abuse. However, we still are called to forgive, turning away from the quest for revenge and entrusting their lives and judgment to the Lord Jesus.

Yet, if we truly grasp that we are guilty, and Jesus took our guilt onto himself on the cross to exhaust all its punishment and power, due in no part to how good we are or how sorry we feel or how much we pledge to make it up. If we grasp that Jesus has given us this gift of forgiveness and removal of our guilt by his blood, how could we not in turn offer the gift of forgiveness someone who has hurt us. Forgiven people forgive, that's the point! If you KNOW you've been forgiven by Jesus, then forgive others who sin against you.

So how free is your forgiveness? How gracious are you with others who hurt you, even in the church? Do you hold offenses over other's heads? Or do you reflect upon how much of your guilt Jesus covered with his blood, that you might be free in extending grace.

In the body, truth and grace go together. And the devil actively seeks to destroy a community built on that truth.

3. We are being built into a Body the devil seeks to destroy.

¹ Scott Hafeman, *2 Corinthians, NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), p. 95.

Look at v. 11, where forgiveness within the body is directly related to Satan's designs? What Paul suggests here is that it is Satan's design to attempt to steal the reality of forgiveness among the body. He loves dissension. He loves conflict where people refuse to listen to and extend grace to one another. He loves it when we get mad and won't talk to each other. In short, Satan's design is to disrupt unity and fellowship by turning God's children against one another. He cannot be reasoned with; he hates you and he hates us. His goal is to destroy us by this means. He seeks to bring to mind old wounds and terrorize with them. He sows seeds of doubt and dissension, removing the air of grace and replacing it with suspicion of one another. When we become a people of suspicion we play in the devil's sandbox.

He seeks the destruction of the body on both ends, the truth end and the grace end. If he can keep us from speaking truth to one another he destroys by corruption. If he can keep us from extending grace to one another, he destroys through harsh self-righteousness.

What protects us against the devil's schemes? The blood of Jesus. The power of the evil one is plundered among a people who are forgiven and forgive. It was by blood that we have been purchased, and it is by the gospel of the cross and power of the Spirit among us that will protect us and build us together. If you've been forgiven, forgive. If you've been hurt, forgive. If you've offended repent, that you may be forgiven. Let us grow as a people of forgiveness, not a people of grudges or suspicions.

I was listening this week to a podcast on how officers in the SEALs lead their teams. One part stood out to me. They are taught whenever a SEAL is dropped behind enemy lines to ask three questions that are drilled into them again and again. 1. Where am I? 2. Where is the enemy? 3. Where is my buddy? They drop in as connected, tied to a buddy, you see. What this SEAL commander said, was if can know the answer to number 3, then you can deal with the first 2. If we know the one to whom we are connected, realizing we can depend on them in the fight, then we can make it through impossible situations.

The same is true for us. Do you know the Jesus to whom you are connected by faith AND do you know his people to whom you are joined in truth and grace. If so, then we will make it...and take the fight to the true enemy of our souls, the devil and all his evil instead of turning on one another.