

20260705 2 Corinthians 2 – Church Discipline, Separation, Restoration, Moving Forward

****All scripture from NKJV unless noted otherwise.*

This last week, I went to Canada to officiate the wedding of one of our young adults. On the way up there, when we reached Calgary, I decided to go ahead of the group and get through customs. I was confused whether my bag was going on to Grande Prairie or whether I had to go pick it up on the carousel and recheck it. Well, I did the wrong thing. I should have just gone through as a transit passenger and picked up my bag at my final destination. All of this ended up costing me about an hour of walking and going back through security unnecessarily. I often travel with a dress shirt that identifies me as a pastor at Union Grove. I sat down on a bench looking at the baggage carousel, and a young man came up to me and asked if he could talk to me for a minute. He said he was very troubled by a verse in 1 Corinthians 5, and wondered if I could help. He was concerned that we are to love people who are in sin, but Paul seems to say that we must separate from them. He intimated that he had things going on in his own life that were sinful, and I guess he wondered if they rose to the level of people in the church separating fellowship from him. He said he didn't know how to reconcile the two positions. The verse he was referring to is:

¹¹ But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. (1 Corinthians 5:11).

I think part of what Paul is addressing in today's passage is a refinement on this idea of separation by church discipline. I will also add some comments on any kind of separation in the church. Sometimes people leave offended or leave for other reasons. Let's get into the text here and you'll see what I mean.

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?

Forgive the Offender

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.

Triumph in Christ

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. (2 Corinthians 2:1-17).

Let us pray.

vv.1-3 We ended our study last week hearing Paul say that he had changed his plans to visit them to "spare them." His first visit to Corinth was painful. He had gone there to straighten them out on sin in the church. You might remember that one man in the congregation was sleeping with his mother in law. Here in Chapter 2 Paul is saying that he doesn't want to cause them any more pain. Paul is saying that he thought coming back to visit them might be too confrontational. Paul had confronted them because they were becoming critical and divisive. He is saying that he didn't like disciplining them because, as our parents used to say to us, "this hurts me more than it hurts you."

This leads us into a conversation about church discipline, and principles on voluntary separation. What am I talking about? One is about people who are removed from a church body for their thoughts, words, or deeds. This is very rare and should only involve something rising to the level of sleeping with one's mother-in-law and doing so blatantly before the church. By sinning in this manner so publicly, they pull down the reputation of the church. I'll also add some comments as to how we are to deal with people who leave the church voluntarily for a variety of reasons. This follows two sermons that might have been a little difficult already: one was on giving and one was on suffering. Regardless of the reason for separation, Paul wants to speak to the Corinthians in a way that is beneficial to God's work.

One reason I write my sermons is because it helps me to think through what I believe a certain Scripture means. It also helps me to think things out. It is very easy to say something incorrectly

or say something that you don't exactly mean when you're just speaking freely, but when you write things out, you can have time to write with clarity and certainty. My spoken sermons can be very different from my written sermons. Writing is a much more accurate way of communicating, and Paul is writing them to keep things clear.

v.4 Paul says that he wrote to them with much affliction and out of many tears. We've all heard our parents say as they disciplined us, "this hurts me more than it hurts you." He says that he is writing this so they will know how much he loves them. I can tell you that separation in the church has been more grievous to me than any case I ever had as a lawyer. This is because the church isn't a court room. It is a piece of the body of Christ. It is way more important than a simple legal case. It is not a place where we litigate disagreements with others.

vv.5-6 Paul explains that what some don't understand is that when they think they're just causing him grief, they are actually grieving the whole church. It has been odd to me how over my time in ministry a small handful of people have left the church angry with me for something that they disagree with in the church. I become the focal point of their anger. This has been very minimal. Probably several hundred people have come through this church in my 10 years of ministry and we're talking about a number so small I can count it on two hands. In each of the cases that I can think of, the person who has left the church fails or refuses to see that they've been instrumental in creating the pain that they have felt. They have been causative in their own separation. In every case, they never see their contribution to their unhappiness. They kick me, I suppose, because it helps them feel better. What they don't understand is that they are not just kicking me, but they are hurting an entire church which is filled with people who, for the most part, love them.

vv.7-8 Paul says that we should "turn to forgive" and reaffirm our love for those people. We don't really know what the issue was that was going on in their lives. Often people have a whole other set of circumstances going on in the lives. It can so easily lead to sorrow. In speaking about those who have been removed by church discipline, Paul says, "Don't associate with those people in order to communicate that sin causes separation." Sin always separates. If we continue to associate with those who claim to be believers but persist in living with an openly rebellious sinful attitude, it can cause those looking on to get the wrong message; that somehow the sin is okay and isn't really that serious. We CANNOT associate with these people.

v.9 He says he wrote to see if they would do the right thing. He wrote them as a test. He's telling them, "I wrote to you seeing if you would change the course of what you were doing." I can say in any and every case of separation with folks who have come through the Grove, we have WEPT at the fact that they are wounded. When the separation continues, we have learned that these who have felt offended and parted ways have the inability to receive forgiveness and to give forgiveness.

How does this look in your own personal lives when we see someone in sin? Like that first verse we read in 1 Corinthians 15:11. We don't disassociate ourselves from all sin or we would disassociate from everyone. We are talking about someone who has been appealed to repeatedly, but continues to remain in their own stubborn attitude doing what they want to do. I can say in my 10 years of pastoring here at the Grove, I have never asked anyone to leave for some horrible sin in their lives. I am constantly praying and hoping for restoration. We are to have those kinds of hearts.

v.10-11 Paul says we must be careful when we confront others. The enemy will do all that he can to bring division instead of restoration. The purpose of our words and actions should be restoration. Offense is the bait of Satan. People get offended and cling to that offense. Satan is scheming to ruin people. He uses pride and arrogance.

So, how does church discipline work today? I've only seen church discipline exercised one time in my entire life. It wasn't in this church, but in another we had a man and a woman on the worship team who were both married and they began to have an adulterous affair. I was an elder in the church and I met with them privately to tell them that they had to stop. They blatantly refused, and they were rebellious in their sin attitude. The key was that most in the church knew it was going on and they were unrepentant. We asked them to separate for a while and pray about what they were doing. It did not end well. Often, people are offended when they don't get their way. One of the problems with today's church is that when separation occurs, people can just go down the street and join another church taking their dysfunction with them. Such ease of moving around never existed back in Corinth.

Summary:

We're talking about two cases here. One is where a church separates from someone living in perpetual rebellious sin, and the other is where people separate themselves. It is usually because they get offended and run off mad. Both cases result in separation.

Case 1 A Sinner who is Removed from Fellowship

- i. We are to love them, pray for them, and do all that we can to encourage them to repent and to come back to the church. In the case that I mentioned above there was no repentance and as far as I know, the couple never was restored.

Case 2 – Separation is Caused but not by Removal

- i. According to the Independent Baptist website, a large percentage of people who leave churches cite feeling offended about something that was thought about

- them, said to them, or done to them. This might be nothing more than a perception, but it is real to them.
- ii. The same website says that often but not always, offense is rooted in pride and self-focus. I took a course at FBC years ago called "Offense, the bait of Satan." Satan uses our pride to manipulate us to be offended unnecessarily. Proverbs 19:11 tells us, "*A person's wisdom yields patience; it is one's glory to overlook an offense.*" (NIV). This is telling us that it is not good to be quick to be offended. James, the brother of Jesus, links quarrels and fights to selfish desires and pride (James 4:1-6; 3:14-16). The writer of Hebrews warns us against letting a "bitter root" grow up and defile many.
 - iii. Love is not easily offended. 1 Corinthians 13:5 describes love *not* as touchy or fretful or resentful (see Amplified). It does not store up or keep a record of wrongs. What does that mean? It means real love doesn't harbor a grudge.
 - iv. The goal is restoration and unity, not winning or punishing. Matthew 18:15-17 gives an outline to go privately and then to two others before going to the whole church. I will add that if no one in the church sees things your way, you just might be wrong. Don't be too arrogant to accept that fact.
 - v. Pray for those who have left your fellowship. Pray that they will have an effective ministry wherever God places them. Don't gossip with others about them. I would add that the same advice goes for the person offended as well. Don't gossip about what caused your offense. In doing so, you will just hurt the cause of Christ.
 - vi. Whether you're the church left behind or the one who has left, examine your own heart with humility. Both parties should ask themselves, "did I/we contribute through insensitivity, unaddressed sin, poor communication, or our own failure?" As I am fond of saying, "Just because you're passionate about something doesn't mean that you are correct or right."
 - vii. If the relationship allows, reach out privately in love, not to argue, litigate, or defend your position, but to understand what is being said. Listen to what the other party has to say without immediately correcting them. They may not be right, but you should listen to them. Prioritize private conversation (Matthew 18).
 - viii. If you can't agree with the other party, forgive, release, and bless them. Wish well for them. Don't speak poorly of the separated party. Forgive as Christ

forgave. If you are the church body, you might say, “You will always be welcomed back at the Grove. We are praying for you.” Remember that the goal isn’t to get them back into the church, but rather their walk with Christ. The great tragedy when someone “leaves mad” is that they will walk away from a life of devotion and service.

- ix. Remember that not every separation is due to arrogance. Sometimes God moves people around to fulfill His purposes. We saw that with the rift between Paul and Barnabas.
- x. Always strive to live at peace with all men. Paul exhorts us to do this. Don’t be offended. Don’t hold grudges. When you do, you are right where the devil wants you to be.

To foster kindness among each other, consider these principles from Scripture:

- Practice forgiveness, just as you have been forgiven.
- Show compassion and empathy towards others' struggles.
- Speak kindly and avoid harsh words or criticism.
- Offer help and support to those in need.
- Be patient and understanding in your interactions.
- Celebrate others' successes and encourage their growth.

So in summary, in this passage we learn that discipline is sometimes needed. It can cause sorrow on all parties. Maybe it’s better to write thoughts instead of using words that can’t be thought out before hand. Words are hard to take back. In the case of voluntary separation, statistics show that it is often because of offense and that the trait of being “easily offended” is often based in pride and arrogance. Forgive others. If you don’t know how to forgive, learn to forgive. Learn how to ask for forgiveness. I think a great verse that sums it all up is: ³² *And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32).*

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.