

## 2 Corinthians 2:1-17

“Restore The Repentant”

Ch 2 is one of those Ch breaks that really don't seem to fit with where it was placed because the subject matter at hand doesn't change here nor does the topic take any real turn at all until Vs 5. Paul has been dealing with his critics and those with the attitude of the cynic there in Corinth. He'd mentioned some potential travel plans that he had; his desire to come to them and all but it didn't work out. Things changed, didn't go as he thought they would or perhaps as they should and so he altered his route. But because of that there were those in the Corinthian company who were criticizing him being cynical in their evaluation of him. “This guy says one thing, but he does another, he's unreliable, untrustworthy, you can't count on him. So if he can't keep his word, if you can't trust what he has to say, then why should we listen to him?” and They're seeking to undermine his person so that they might take from him his position in the lives of the Christians there in Corinth. and As we came to a close last week it was with Paul explaining to them *why* he didn't come to them.

and It wasn't for his sake, because he had some sort of agenda that he was serving that he didn't come to them. It was for *their* sake, to spare them the brutal conflict and personal confrontation that would've come along with him. It wasn't his heart to add insult to the injury that had already taken place via his dealings with them so far. He loved them, wanted to be a blessing to them, not a burden. But the cynic never sees what you do, or hears what you say in a manner that could actually help them; they're always looking beneath the surface, searching for ulterior motives. “What did you *really* mean by that?” “What was the *true* motive behind your doing that?” Because for the cynic it can never be simply what you say or what you display, there's something else to it, and it's either negative or self-serving, it's never legitimately seeking to help them or be a blessing to them. and As believers we've got to get away from that mentality, we're to give people the benefit of the doubt. How much more our brothers and sisters? The love of Christ in you, in me (though not naïve, wise as serpents gentle as doves) will bear all things, hope all things, believe all things, think no evil. My point being that if the love of Christ is at work in my life, in my heart I'm not going to automatically think the worst of my brother, or question the motives of my sister in that situation. Paul told the Ephesians, “...walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Eph 4:1-3 Now certainly there is that element of discernment whereby the Spirit may be speaking insight to your heart. But I've got to be careful that I don't give justification to my cynical mentality by stating that the Spirit is speaking to my heart when in reality I just have a real problem trusting people and have a tendency to take a cynical attitude toward people. If you have no reason to question someone, then you have no reason to question them, God is the One who brings into the light the things done in darkness. God is the One who shouts from the rooftops the things whispered in the ear, that's not my job, I'm not to be poking and prodding or placing question marks on everything. I'm to be lowly, gentle, bearing with you in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So here Paul is talking to them about the situation, and he moves from *why* he didn't come to *how* it is that he wants to come, it wasn't going to work out the way things were, it'd have only gotten ugly. Should the dust settle, it can be an occasion of joy, and that's what he desires. Let's back up to Vs 23 of Ch 1 so that we can follow the flow here as we enter in to Ch 2.

### Vs 23 Ch 1- Vs 2 Ch 2

Which is to say, "Our relationship should be an *encouragement* to one another not a *discouragement* to one another." So Paul says, "I purposed with in myself that I wasn't going to come to you again as long as the situation between us was so volatile." and Really I think the point here is that he realized that constant conflict could damage their relationship. So he purposed with in himself to just pull back a bit, let the dust settle and give the Lord some room to move. *I think that sometimes we can overcrowd or crowd out the Lord's work in a situation by always being up in the middle of it. Sometimes we just need to step back, step out and let the Lord have His way. Paul had written to them, they didn't respond well. He then visited them, it went even worse.* So realizing that more damage than good was coming from his pressing in on them he opted to create a little space between them so the dust could settle, and a little time could go by whereby they might reflect on what was said, his love for them in saying it, and then see how they would respond to it after the tension died down. *You ever notice how that when the tension is high and everyone is on the edge in a given situation (say a family spat) that no matter what is said it generally only gets more and more heated. But when everyone goes to their respective corners, a little time goes by, everyone is able to see a little more clearly and come together so as to work through the situation rationally?* That's what's happening here. Paul is saying, "I want our relationship to be a good one, not one that's frustrating or exasperating, so I backed off that things might die down and the Spirit might have a chance to move here lest things continue to escalate in a negative manner."

### Vs3-4

*Paul wrote some things to them that were very difficult to palate, hard to take in, that could quite possibly wound a person being confronted over a particular matter. But he says, "I didn't do that to be a burden to you or bring you down, my desire is to be a blessing to you and to build you up." I've yet to meet a person who really enjoys confrontation.* Oh, sometimes it has to be done and so it gets done, but no one looks forward to it. Because it seems that almost invariably people believe you're attacking their person or saying that you're better than them as opposed to really wanting to see them excel and grow in godliness, or be spared from the ramifications of a certain course of action.

It's difficult for people in that situation to really see that you're for them and not against them, that the wound you're administering is faithful as opposed to the deceitful kisses of an enemy. Paul is saying here, "It wasn't easy for me to write to you the things that I had to say. I didn't get any sense of joy or satisfaction from confronting you in that manner, it was out of affliction and anguish of heart that I wrote to you, with *many* tears." Paul wept for them, he didn't want them to perceive his words as an attack *on* them but rather an overflow of love *toward* them. He's like a parent saying, "Believe me it hurt me way more than it hurt you." You tell the kids not to play in the street all they see is you coming down on them, seeking to squelch them and take their fun away.

But you're able to see beyond that, you know it could be fatal to them so you're willing to be the bad guy, not because it's your joy to make them mad or get them upset at you, but because you love them you'll endure the negative thoughts *toward* you or the perspective they have *of* you. I say it over and over again but as a believer you have to come to a point where you love people more than you like them. and What I mean by that is that if all you're worried about is people being your friends, then your relationship to someone will be of little to no value to them ultimately, because you won't be willing to rock the boat lest you lose them as a friend.

But if because I *love* you I'm willing to risk the friendship I have *with* you if ultimately what I have to say might help you in your walk and relationship with Christ, now I'm a true friend, I stand to benefit you, to bless you and be of value to you. Paul did what he had to do, and said what he had to say (not for his sake) for the betterment of these believers, trying to head them off from going down that pathway of destruction, that way that would ruin them spiritually.

### Vs5-8

Now the idea that Paul is coming around to here is that when it comes to the full circle of dealing with a sinning saint in the church, *restoring* is just important as is *rebuking*. and There's a little uncertainty regarding exactly whom Paul is referring to here but most seem to believe it's that same brother to whom Paul referred back in Ch 5 of 1<sup>st</sup> Cor who was sleeping with his step-mom in incestuous adultery and the church was doing nothing about it in the name of love/unity and tolerance. "Peace at any price," is not a biblical premise. The bible tells us that, "...the wisdom that is from above is first pure, **then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.**" James 3:17 **Before there can be unity there must be purity, I can't condone a sin infested situation and come together regardless of that for the sake of unity and call that love; that's compromise. Love deals in truth, and the truth is that if it's sin I have to call it sin.** and Sin creates a separation between you and God and you and me. 1<sup>st</sup> of all there's purity, then there's peace; or unity. But when a situation is called out (in love) for what it is, dealt with in a manner that's scriptural, the person responds and repents, then what do you do? You forgive them, comfort them and restore them.

You recall that Paul addressed this situation there in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor Ch 5. and He said, "Good night! You're ok with this guy calling himself a Christian, coming to church with you in open defiance of the Word of God and you have no intentions of dealing with it, but rather you're puffed up thinking that your tolerance of it displays love toward him?" He said, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Or to understand that another way, "Get that guy out from under the covering and the community of the church family. Deliver him to the dominion of Satan that he might come to understand the full force of his ways, even if it means the destruction of his flesh that his spirit might be saved in the end."

So again we note that the ultimate intent of church discipline isn't condemnation but rather repentance and *restoration*. Well, it seems that to their credit the Corinthians followed Paul's instructions, got this guy out of the church and the discipline had the desired effect; the guy repented.

But now in typical Corinthian fashion the pendulum swung to the other extreme, they went from tolerating it openly and candidly, to refusing to deal with this guy, and shutting him out regardless of how his life had changed. and Paul is saying, “Look, enough is enough you dealt with it, he repented, now restore him.”

“The punishment that’s been inflicted has been sufficient. Now instead of continuing to keep him at arms distance you ought to forgive him and comfort him lest he be swallowed up with too much sorrow.” The idea being that if you don’t show this guy that you’ve forgiven him, that you’re prepared to restore him into fellowship he’s going to think, “What’s the point?” and throw in the towel. That’s why he says there in Vs 5 not to be too severe, but rather (Vs 6) consider the punishment sufficient and (Vs 7) forgive and comfort him.

and I’m glad that the Holy Spirit inspired to write the words “Forgive” and “Comfort.” Because there can be a sense in which we forgive people, but it’s almost in a judiciary sense, there’s a hardness to it, keeps the violator conscious of the past, there’s no comfort to it.

That’s not the way God forgives, and that’s not to be the way we forgive. We’re to forgive as God forgives us in Christ. The bible says, “...*be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*” Eph 4:32 God doesn’t say, “Well... I’ll forgive you but you’re going to relive it every time you make a mistake from this point forward.” God says, “...*I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.*” Jer 31:34 **Now does that mean God literally can’t remember what you’ve done, what I’ve done? No, it means He won’t mention it again, He won’t recall it and hold it against you. He mingles comfort with His forgiveness. Even so we’re to forgive and to comfort the repentant, let’s not forget that the entire church is made up of repentant sinners, we’ve all been there. But we can do more damage by not restoring then the good that’s come through the rebuking if we’re not willing to follow through on that full circle of restoration after the repentance.**

Now as a quick little side note forgiveness and restoration *is* predicated on repentance. You will be hard pressed to find scriptural support for having to forgive a person who’s not repentant. **Now I think that our heart should always be poised and ready to forgive even as God’s heart is poised and ready to forgive. But even God Himself doesn’t forgive apart from repentance, if you don’t repent and come to Christ God won’t forgive your sin. How can there be forgiveness apart from repentance?** But once that repentance takes place we’re to be eager to forgive, quick to restore and comfort lest they be swallowed up with too much sorrow, reaffirm your love to them.

**Vs9**

“**You did well in following my instructions in discipline, now you need to follow my instruction in restoration, in showing love and forgiveness.**” There needs to be that balance, we need to be obedient in *all* things. For some of us it’s easier to show love, for others of us it’s easier to just be tough and decisive. and There’s an appropriate place for both, but we need the balance of being able to administer each of them in their appropriate place. Don’t be tough on a person that needs to know you love them, but don’t coddle a situation that demands discipline.

## Vs10-11

Apparently in some way, shape, or form this fella had violated Paul as well, perhaps when he visited Corinth after his letter didn't go as he'd planned this guy got up in his face or sought to undermine his apostolic authority, we don't know. **But Paul says, "Hey, if this guy has repented, before Christ I forgive him." and He's encouraging them to take the lead on that, they're there, they know what's going on, you forgive him, I forgive him.**

## Vs11

You guys underline this Vs; Satan will take advantage of us through unforgiveness. He has all kinds of subtleties and strategies (what's referred to here as "devices") through which he seeks to take advantage and get the upper hand upon you and upon a church body. The one Paul points out here is unforgiveness. A few minutes ago we quoted out of Eph 4:32 with reference to forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us. **Earlier in that Ch Paul tells us that by grieving the Holy Spirit through things like anger, or harboring a bitter and unforgiving spirit we, "give place to the devil."** That is, we give him a basis of operation, the idea with respect to Satan taking advantage of us is that of giving him a "beachhead" from which to operate with in the congregation, or with in our marriage, or family unit. Satan wants to damage the body of Christ, or get between you and your spouse so as to take down your marriage, or tear into your family and take it apart, and often times the "base" from which he operates is that of unforgiveness, of harboring bitterness or resentment. **We're not to be ignorant of his devices lest we fall prey to his strategies, and give him a stronghold in our lives, in our fellowship, or in our family. You've got to remember that Satan's chief agenda is to kill, to steal, and to destroy.**

Jesus said, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."* John 10:10 and He has lots of angles he works from but his bottom line objective is always the same. You see Paul mentions the device of unforgiveness here, but even just a little consideration of the bigger picture and we can see multiple devices by which the enemy has been at work here. 1<sup>st</sup> of all he was at work in this brother's life in the arena of lust, from there once he sought to get right with God he started working on him from the angle of hopelessness and despair, overwhelming and unhealthy sorrow. **A sorrow of the world which causes me to want to give in and give up, the Spirit's conviction draws me near to God, Satan's condemnation drives me away from God in despair. That's a device of the enemy don't be ignorant of it; receive conviction, but reject condemnation, if you're in Christ there is no condemnation toward you, Jesus bore that. If you repent God is eager to restore.** Now with the Corinthians Satan was at work 1<sup>st</sup> of all in seeking to get them to tolerate sin in the name of love, allowing that little bit of leaven in there so as to infiltrate the entirety of the lump, weaken and breakdown the body through un-dealt with open sin in their midst. Then he moved to the other extreme, "You don't want to tolerate him, great. Isolate him, punish him, regardless of what he might say, or what change he might display he's blown it and isn't welcome around here anymore." **W/Paul it was in the arena of seeking to get him so stressed out and overwhelmed that he couldn't even function in ministry because he was so focused on this one thing specifically. Satan has all kinds of devices, schemes and plotting, it's our responsibility to not be ignorant of that lest we give him ground in our lives through those things.**

Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, allow Him to unveil to you those areas in which the enemy is seeking to get a foothold on your life, or in your marriage, in your family or in your fellowship that you might wage wise warfare, praying against it, resisting the devil in Jesus name that he might flee from you.

### Vs12-13

We've made mention of this a couple times so we won't linger on it today. The point here is simply that God had opened a door to him, but he departed. Now it's true that we don't want seek to do a work where God *hasn't* opened the door, but it's also true that there may be times when a door opens that for whatever reason we don't feel as though we can take advantage of that. We don't have to jump through every open door, sometimes there will be multiple doors open before you, and you can't do it all or be everywhere. Then what do you do? You'll drive yourself nuts if you pursue every path every opportunity. We serve a gracious God, He gives us more opportunity than we know what to do with sometimes. But He also remembers our frame and knows that we're but dust, Paul felt that with out Titus with him he just wasn't going to be effective and so he pressed on, there was no sin in that, no shame in that, he simply pressed on.

Now, notice here that he mentions departing for Macedonia, look quickly at Ch 7 Vs 5 (read). The reason I point that out is because from this point forward until Ch 7 Vs 5 we enter into a section sometimes referred to as "The Great Digression." Vs 13 of Ch 1 and Vs 5 of Ch 7 sorta form 2 parenthesis. and Inside them is all kinds of personal information about Paul and his ministry, so there are some jewels ahead of us to be sure, but I wanted you to see that so that when we get there should we refer back to this you'll understand what's taken place. So here Paul digresses a bit and though he's been through troubling times he realizes that in Christ he's triumphant so he issues forth Vs 14 in praise.

### Vs14-16

Now to us we read this and think, well that sounds sorta cool but where does he get this stuff, we're the aroma of death to some, but life to others; what is he talking about?

Paul is drawing a parallel from a very specific Roman occasion which was basically a "Triumph Parade." and It was a rare and special occasion whereby if you were a general in the Roman army, had been on a campaign whereby at least 5,000 of the enemy were slain in a single battle, and in that battle you had expanded the territory of Rome when you came home you would be honored with this "Triumph parade." and The senate would meet you, and go before you, there would be trumpeters, the spoils of war all before and about you, pictures and models of the conquered lands throughout your campaign, a white bull would then follow which was to be sacrificed. Following that would be the various princes and leaders, various generals in chains and captives of war that as you made your way to the Circus Maximus there they would be executed as they were thrown to beasts or forced to fight for their lives to entertain the crowds. Then would come the musicians, and the priests swinging censors of incense and finally here you yourself (the general) arrayed in the finest apparel a soldier could be placed in, all decorated and riding in a golden chariot drawn by 4 white horse would come shouting a cry of triumph. and Garland was everywhere, the army following behind the general, cheering crowds it would've been an amazing sight to say the least.

Well Paul is saying, “Christ is that general, He left His home in heaven, came to a ‘foreign’ land called earth. Disarmed powers and principalities making a public spectacle of them triumphing over them through the cross, and in the course of His triumphant parade throughout this earth believers are like the incense that’s waved about.” Well, what makes us the scent of life Vs the scent of death? Depends on where you’re at in the parade my friend. If you’re in the army, if you’re a citizen of the kingdom, the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ in your midst is a sweet savor indeed; its life, its victory. However if you’re in chains being led to you’re ultimate undoing, your destruction in judgment, it’s a sickening scent that only reminds you of your soon coming death.

So the idea is this; Christ has been triumphant, it’s a done deal, and you as a believer are being waved about throughout the earth dispersing the fragrance of His knowledge in every place, you’re sharing and showing Jesus, giving out the gospel. To those who receive you’re the sweet savor of life unto life. To those who reject it you’re the aroma of death, leading to death.

Now, who is sufficient, who is worthy of that type of responsibility? By default in Christ you are the instrument that brings salvation, or that brings condemnation through the message you carry. But here’s the deal salvation/condemnation, that’s not on you, you’re merely the incense, whether it’s a sweet scent, or a sickening scent of death is up to the individual who is “inhaling” or taking in the message. But it’s a heavy responsibility (in Ch 3 we’ll see our sufficiency is of God) and that’s why Paul takes his position so seriously.

**Vs17**

I think that any teacher of God’s Word, on any level, children’s ministry, home study, from the pulpit (as well as anyone who simply shares God’s word) does well to remember that we speak in the sight of God. He’s listening to how we share His word, represent His heart; Paul says, “I’m aware of that fact so I’m sincere, pure in my motives with regard to what I do and say. We’re not peddling the word of God.” There a plenty of people out there who will water down God’s word, do what they have to do to make the sell, get you to buy in to their angle so as to somehow profit off of you. Paul is saying, “That’s not me.” and Let me just tell you that that’s not this ministry either, we’re not about telling you what you want to hear. We’re about speaking the truth of the Word of God in love.

We’re about diffusing the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ and it’s our prayer that it be unto you the fragrance of life, leading to life.

### Prayer Points:

God may we always be true to You and true to Your Word both individually and as a body as we represent You to the world around us. and Father we realize that not everyone will respond in a positive way but it's our prayer that we might be the fragrance of life, leading to life as You diffuse the fragrance of Christ through us to those around us. **and God may we exercise wisdom and may You grant us discernment that we not be ignorant of our enemies devices as he seeks to take advantage of us through various schemes, and destructive strategies.** and I pray that anyone here who may've given the enemy a foothold through unforgiveness, or bitterness, unbiblical tolerance or perhaps too severe a punishment when there needs to be restoration, forgiveness and comfort. God that You might drive the enemy back granting us victory in Christ who always leads us in triumph. We thank You that in You we're more than Conquerors, not fighting *for* victory, but fighting *from* victory, and so we give You praise.

**If God is dealing with you, drawing you, speaking to you about your need for Christ then I want to give you an opportunity to respond to Him in that right now. The knowledge of Christ is here before you, He died for your sin, and was raised for your justification. Salvation is a gift, forgiveness of sin is found only in Him.** To receive Him is take in the message of life leading to life. To reject Him is to be plagued by the aroma of death leading to death, eternal separation from God in isolation, outer darkness. That's not God's desire, He's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. That choice is up to you, receive Him today.