

Challenges to Relationships
2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11

²³ But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. ²⁴ Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.

² For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. ² For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? ³ And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. ⁴ For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

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.

—2 Corinthians 1:23-2:11 (ESV)

Background: Paul and his fellows had been criticized for not returning to Corinth, having indicated that they would.

v 23 – “But I call upon God as a witness...”

actually, as a witness to my soul (!)

Paul did not want his love to the church—or his integrity—to be in any doubt

A healthy ministry cannot exist without love and trust

“it was to spare you...”

His last letter had been a challenging one, having to address/correct the church there regarding many issues

Factionalism, immaturity, tolerance of flagrant sinning, wrongful teaching about spiritual gifts, wrongful worship practices, ...

Paul wanted to be able to visit not as a disciplinarian, but as a fellow servant of Christ

v 24 – “Not that we lord it over your faith...”

Not that we rule your faith, Not that we dominate your faith

The apostles *did* teach with authority but with the goal of seeing Christ formed in others—not in order to be elevated or to be dictators

“but we work with you...”

We are fellow workers for joy, for you to stand firm in your faith.

The way to “joy” and to “standing firm” will involve correction where it is needed

The motive for the correction is the joyful, lasting benefit it brings to those who are being corrected.

2:1-2 – “For I made up my mind...”

Paul was simply unwilling to visit again until he could come in a different role

If he grieves the church, there is no one left to bring joy!

vv 3-4 – “I wrote as I did...”

His previous letter had already been an effort to bring about change (following his ministry there) so that his next visit might not be characterized by confrontation

Paul was willing to engage in the conflict, but he was grieved by it

What he valued, what he sought, was the unity of the spirit in the bond of love

But carnal and sinful practices—along with false teachings to support such things—make this impossible

“I wrote to you out of much affliction...”

It was upsetting to Paul in every way

His relationship with the church, the state and future of the church itself, the harm that was being caused

This was quite a different person than Saul of Tarsus who had persecuted the church!

v 5 – Now if anyone has caused pain

Perhaps referencing a communication he may have received from Corinth, that they regretted causing him pain, or acknowledging that he had been pained...

v 6 – For such a one...

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. ² And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.—1

Corinthians 5:1-2 (The entire chapter in in regard to this matter.)

Apparently this man was mentioned as having brought pain to Paul

He also was apparently disciplined—put out of the fellowship

The practice of church discipline has been quite varied and uneven down through the ages, including up to the present time.

Unfortunately, more examples of abuse easily come to mind than of actual, effective disciplining of Christian living

(And we cannot resolve these matters during this Bible study.)

For this man at Corinth, his “punishment by the majority [was] enough.”

vv 7-8 – so you should rather turn to forgive...

Paul's perhaps unexpected instruction: now “you should turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”

The goal is redemptive. The goal is reconciliation. Reaffirmation of love. Whatever forms church discipline takes, this should be the desired outcome.

What we desire for anyone is that they come into right relationship with Christ—not to be
“overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” and despair
There is no “well he had it coming” to be found in any of this

“I beg you” – Paul’s urging and emphasis
“reaffirm your love for him”

A love that always is to be present
We must be *proactive* in restoration

v 9 – “For this is why I wrote...”

I consider that Paul is here beginning a new “paragraph”

More lit. “For this also did I write...”

“That I might prove you and know whether you are obedient in everything” [the sense
being “and I rejoice that you are!”]

Paul had to depend upon the churches giving heed to his letters for their own well-
being—and there were people in every place who opposed Paul and his letters.
He was not “playing games” to see what they would do

v 10 – “Anyone whom you forgive...”

Essentially, we are in agreement in this matter: you forgive him and so do I.

Beyond that, for me to forgive any perceived grief caused to me is not even the point

My work among you, including the forgiving, if needed, of anything has been for your
building up in Christ

v 11 – so that...

we would not be taken advantage of, cheated by Satan

Satan is the enemy of God and His people

Satan will always seek to stir up trouble in a peaceful, loving, God-honoring church

We are to be vigilant and spot his efforts to bring grief, corruption, and disunity

For we are not—and are not to be—ignorant of this schemes