

2. Concern for the ones offended vv. 9-11

Secondly, the Apostle knew that discipline and forgiveness work **for the sake of the ones offended** as much as for the offender. Avoiding conflict and letting it fester or harboring unforgiveness and refusing to pardon someone are **equally destructive journeys**. God wants us to be a community that seeks the **harmony in our fellowship**. We should be able to tell stories of the restoration of those who have wronged us (see Hebrews 12:15; Ephesians 4:26, 27 and Romans 12:9-21). Take note of Jesus' instructions to Jewish believers in Matthew 18:12-20.

3. Concern for the offender's restoration vv. 6-7

Thirdly, we can see that Paul is concerned not simply to see the destructive behavior cease, but to see the offender fully restored. After much pastoral pressure from Paul the Corinthians finally disciplined the offender sufficiently. But Paul urges them to finish the task, writing in vs. 7, "... you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him."

Stone or Sand—a fable about forgiveness

2 friends were travelling through the desert. During the journey they had an argument and one friend slapped the other in the face. The one who was slapped was upset but, without saying anything, wrote in the **sand**: TODAY MY BEST FRIEND SLAPPED ME IN THE FACE.

They kept walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to have a swim. The one who'd been slapped earlier on the journey got into difficulties and started to drown, but his friend dived in and saved him. After he'd recovered from his near drowning, the man carved on a **stone**: TODAY MY BEST FRIEND SAVED MY LIFE.

The friend who had both slapped and saved his best friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now you write on a stone, why?" The friend replied "**When someone hurts us we should write it down in the sand where the winds of forgiveness can blow it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it on a stone where no wind can ever erase it.**"



#2 Tough Love 2 Corinthians 2:1-11

"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."

2 Corinthians 2:4

Warm Up

Imagine you are leading a team of volunteer charity workers during a fund-raising event. One of the core volunteers has been spreading ugly and unfounded rumours about the head of the charity organisation among the other volunteers. It's not the first time you've heard this has been happening. The matter has been brought to your attention by another volunteer who is concerned about growing unrest in the group.



- How should you view the offender?
- What should you as leader do next?
- What place is there for punishment, and what form might it take?
- What action is needed towards the other volunteers?
- How much emphasis should be placed on forgiveness and restoration of the offender?



Introduction READ 2 Corinthians 2:1-11 & 7:5-15

We're not certain of the identity, the crime or the punishment meted out in relation to a certain offender in the Christian community at Corinth. Paul simply writes in 1:5

“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.”

It may be too difficult to equate this offender with the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 who was expelled for a time due to sexual immorality. What we can say here is that someone was attacking Paul's integrity and standing in the Christian community. This is why Paul has to defend his own loyalty and love for the church so forthrightly in this letter. For example in 1:12 Paul writes:

“Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.”

It seems that the Corinthians didn't act to put a stop to a man who was undermining Paul's standing in the community. In the past, the Corinthian Christians hadn't called the offender to account and had applied no discipline. The result was a destabilizing of this fledgling church community in a bustling pagan city and a sully of Paul's name. So worried was Paul about this destabilization and disharmony, that he sent a severe letter to make the church take action and correct the offender's behaviour. He thought he might have to visit them for another 'painful' visit to urge them to act on the trouble-maker in their midst. However, the previous letter seemed to do its job. In 2:3-4 he writes:

- 3 “I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make 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.”

Getting into the text—2 Corinthians chapter 2:1-11



Vs. 1 Why would Paul consider his decision not to visit the Corinthians again an act of mercy that would “spare” them (1:23)?

Vss. 2-4 What do you glean from these verses about the nature of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church and what does this suggest about his ministry as a church leader? (compare 1 Thessalonians 2:6-12)

Vss. 5,6 How can Paul so easily state that the offense caused (probably a direct attack on his reputation) has not so much grieved him as it has the whole church? What might have enabled him to absorb the offence and be concerned more with the church's well-being?

Though we don't know what the punishment was that was meted out on the offender, why does Paul seek to put an end to it by saying that what's been done is “sufficient”?

Vss. 7-11 What does this section teach us about the goal of church discipline?

What would be some alternative approaches to dealing with the offender that might better represent Satan's ways of undermining God's purposes?

Paul's Principles of Church Discipline

1. Concern for the church above self v5

Firstly, in the church Paul puts the **corporate bond** that exists in a community of Christians first. The church is not described as the **body of Christ** and the **family of God** for nothing; when **one part suffers so do all**. Being joined to Christ and to one another in baptism is supposed to give a clear sense that **no one is an island**.