

Introduction

1. In these first seven chapters Paul has been defending himself against the false accusations brought against him by some in the Corinthians church
2. He began by defending his suffering and used it to teach us that:
  - a. God provides compassion and comfort when we suffer
  - b. That our suffering enables us to comfort others
  - c. And that our suffering always has a divine purpose
3. Last week he defended his general conduct among the Corinthians and his change of plans in postponing another visit
4. In our passage today he takes an aside and addresses the issue of discipline and forgiveness
  - a. There is no consensus regarding the individual referred to in this passage
  - b. Some suggest it may be the man from 1 Corinthians 5 who engaged in sexual immorality with his father's wife
  - c. Another possibility is that this was some individual who had sinned against Paul specifically—possibly one of his accusers and on Paul's last trip (this is the sense that I personally have—more on this later)
  - d. It might be something completely different and totally unknown
  - e. We will touch on this in a moment
5. Paul's ultimate goal in these seven verses is to encourage the Corinthians to forgive and comfort the brother after his apparent repentance, so as not to cause him to despair
6. There are a number of principles that we can learn from this

A. One person's sin can often cause sorrow in the entire church body (5)

1. Many mistakenly think that sin only affects the person sinning, or maybe one other person if the sin is against another person, but that's not necessarily true
2. In our passage today we are introduced to an unknown man who caused sorrow for the entire Corinthian church (5): **"But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree-- in order not to say too much-- to all of you."**
3. We don't know much about the individual or the offense he committed:
  - a. Some of the language suggests that the individual has sinned against Paul specifically
    - 1) **"not to me"** is better understood as **"not to me alone"** or **"not only to me"** (as the NET, HCSB, NIV)
    - 2) Paul makes a point of stating that he had personally forgiven the individual (10)
  - b. However, other language in the passage makes it clear that whatever the offense or sin was, it was also an offense against the body of Christ at Corinth
    - 1) Paul wrote that this individual had **"in some degree...[caused sorrow] to all of you"**
    - 2) Paul also encouraged them later in the passage to forgive the brother and comfort him by their love

Bill Hybel's offenses (if true) were against individual women in the church, but they impact the entire church family

B. Spiritual discipline is intended to bring about repentance and restoration (6)

1. The phrase **“this punishment which was inflicted by the majority”** indicates that the individual had undergone a form of church discipline, likely removal from the local church body:
  - a) Paul doesn't state specifically what form the punishment took or what it involved
  - b) However, we may find a clue in related passages:
    - 1) In 1 Corinthians 5:1-12 Paul instructed the Corinthians to stop associating with a brother or sister who engages in sexual immorality without repentance
    - 2) In Titus 3:9:11 Paul calls on the local church body to reject an individual who causes factions within the church
    - 3) In Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus provided instructions on dealing with individuals who refuse correction, the last step of which is to treat them like an outsider (e.g. not to afford them the privileges of being a part of the body of Christ)
  - c) Such discipline by the local church body is intended to bring about two things: a change in the heart and a change in behavior—in other words, remorse and repentance
    - 1) Isn't this why we discipline our children—to see them correct disobedient behavior and attitudes and replace them with proper attitudes and actions?
    - 2) These are certainly God's goals when He chastises us: READ Hebrews 12:7-11
    - 3) So it should be with the local church family when it needs to discipline one of its own: **“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.”** (Galatians 6:1)
2. Paul's statement that the punishment was **“sufficient”** indicates two things:
  - a. The first is that it indicates that the discipline been enough to bring about the man's repentance (this is supported by the rest of the context)
  - b. That it was time for the discipline to end

C. Love and forgiveness are expected when repentance is demonstrated (7-10)

1. Paul calls on the Corinthians to now **“forgive and conform”** their brother who demonstrated repentance (7): **“so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him,”**
  - a. The most common Greek word for forgive is *aphiemi* which means to send away—however, Paul uses a different word here, *charisomai*, which means to give or grant graciously and generously, with the implication that it is done out of good will
  - b. So, Paul has in mind here not simply forgiving sin, but going beyond that to actively expressing good and grace toward the repentant brother
  - c. This is supported by the second word Paul uses, **“comfort”**, which is the Greek word *parakaleo* which literally means to speak along side someone—that's a fancy way of referring to encouraging or consoling someone

2. Paul expects (the infinitives carry the weight of an imperative here) the Corinthians to forgive and comfort this repentant brother because it accomplishes three purposes (7-8):
  - a. The first purpose is that it helps ensure that the one who sinned and repented doesn't become overwhelmed with sorrow (7): The NET renders it this way, **"This will keep him from being overwhelmed by excessive grief to the point of despair."**
  - b. The second purpose is that it reaffirms our love for the one who had been restored (8): **"Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him."**

Hugging and praying with the kids after we'd spank them—though, I still struggle today and need to do a better job of showing love and affection and encouragement after I discipline them as teen agers

- c. The third purpose is that it prevents Satan from using the situation to attack the church (9-11):
  - 1) When Paul wrote his severe letter, it apparently included his call on them to discipline this individual and it served as a test so Paul would know how willing they were to obey (9): **"For to this end also I wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things."**
  - 2) They passed the test by disciplining the man, and now that he had repented it was time for forgiveness—with Paul leading the way as an example (10): **"But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ,"**
  - 3) Such forgiveness is critical because otherwise the enemy can use the situation to his advantage against us (11): **"so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes."**
    - a) This is precisely why we are warned not to let the sun go down on our anger—an unwillingness to forgive provides the devil with an opportunity (Ephesians 4:26-27): **"BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity."**
    - b) The Bible calls him **"crafty"** (Genesis 3:1) and **"cunning"** (2 Corinthians 11:3)
    - c) Peter wrote that he **"prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"** (1 Peter 5:8-9)
    - d) When we refuse to not only forgive, but to encourage and love, a brother or sister who expresses remorse and repentance for their sin, we open the door for the enemy to devour and destroy
    - e) But when we forgive, encourage and love we slam that door shut

### Conclusion

1. Church discipline is an uncomfortable topic for many
2. When someone is involved in habitual sin serious enough to have to be addressed by the body as a whole, there are often different responses:
  - a. Some just ignore the issue thinking it's none of their business or that it's no big deal
  - b. Some see any form of corporate discipline as unloving or "judgmental"
  - c. Still others are more than happy to point fingers, publicly rebuke and then hang a giant Scarlet "S" (for sinner) around the person's neck for life
  - d. Obviously, none of these are proper Biblically

3. Instead, the church's response should be to come together with the singular purpose of holding the brother or sister accountable for their sin with the goal of restoring them in their relationship with Christ and the local church body
4. It's not enough, however, to discipline—discipline must be followed up with genuine forgiveness, encouragement and love when the brother or sister expresses remorse and repentance
5. This not only helps ensure they don't become discouraged, but it reaffirms that they are loved by the body (and therefore Christ) and protects the church family from the enemies attacks