

Paul had previously instructed the Corinthian church to excommunicate an unrepentant man who was living in sin. The church had obeyed and Paul is urging them to restore their fellowship with the now repentant man. These instructions demonstrate that the ultimate goal of church discipline is not to punish but to bring sinners to repentance so that fellowship can be restored with God and the church.

Verses 1-2: In the end of the previous chapter, Paul spoke of his plans to visit Corinth on his way to Judea, but had postponed his plans in order to spare the Corinthians the somber tone that his visit would take because of the rebukes that would be necessary (2 Cor. 1:15-24). He now describes the sorrow that he would have had during this visit and was concerned that they would not be able to relieve his sorrow after he had made them sorrowful because of the stern rebukes.

3 And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is *the joy of you all*.

“And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice” – The context provided by vs. 4-11 indicate that Paul was concerned about a sinful situation concerning a certain unrepentant man in the church and he had written a letter to the Corinthians between the two letters we know of as 1 and 2 Corinthians. In this letter Paul apparently addressed the sin of the situation, urging the Corinthians to correct it. Paul’s hope was that the Corinthians would repent and deal with the sin before his next visit so that it would be one of joy instead of sorrow.

“having confidence in you all, that my joy is *the joy of you all*” – Paul declares that he was confident that they would respond to his words by repenting and correcting the situation. He also knew that they would all share in the joy once the sin had been removed.

4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears” – It brought Paul no pleasure to have to rebuke the Corinthians. It broke his heart that that they had sinned and that a rebuke had become necessary in order to correct the situation.

“not that ye should be grieved [*made sorrowful*], but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” – The purpose of Paul’s letter was not to make the Corinthians sorrowful, which might have been true if he merely wanted to punish them. Instead, his hope was that they would see that it was his abundant love for them that compelled him to write the previous letter containing the rebukes. His love for them compelled him to write, urging them to deal with the sin in the church.

5 But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all.

“But if any have caused grief [*sorrow*], he hath not grieved me, but in part” – The “if” in this line does not indicate that Paul may or may not have become sorrowful by the actions of the Corinthians (or of a single man). It is a rhetorical “if,” because Paul has already stated that he experienced sorrow over this situation (v. 4). His point here is that the sorrow that he experienced limited in scope. He had not taken personal offense but simply wanted them to repent for their own benefit.

“that I may not overcharge [*become burdensome*] you all” – Paul did not want to put more of a burden on them than was necessary. The sin had been dealt with and this man had repented, so discipline was no longer necessary, as revealed in the next verses.

6 Sufficient to such a man *is* this punishment, which *was inflicted* of many.

This verse indicates that the focus of Paul’s rebuke was on a single man. Most commentators believe that this man was the one involved in an incestuous relationship with his father’s wife (1 Cor. 5:1-13). Apparently the church had obeyed Paul’s command to excommunicate this man in order to compel him to repent. This punishment had served its purpose and Paul now declares that it should now end so that this man could be welcomed back into church fellowship.

7 So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. 8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm *your* love toward him.

“So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*” – The Corinthians should treat this man the way that God treats us when we repent of our sins. They should forgive and comfort him, welcoming him back into their fellowship.

“lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow” – The purpose of the punishment was to provoke repentance. Once that purpose has been served then the punishment should end. To continue the excommunication may have caused the man to give up, pushing him further away from God instead of bringing him closer. Sin should never be condoned but we should always be ready to love and forgive those who have repented of their sins.

“Wherefore I beseech [*to beg; to urge*] you that ye would confirm [*affirm; validate*] *your* love toward him” – The Greek word for “confirm” carries the idea of a public affirmation of their love. This would make it clear to the whole church and to the man himself that his excommunication was over and that he was once again welcome into their fellowship. The excommunication was not a rejection of the man himself but of his sin. Restoration could happen once the sin was gone.

9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

Paul admits to an ulterior motive for writing the strong rebukes in his previous letter to them. He wanted to “prove” (test) the Corinthians to see if they would be obedient to his apostolic authority and take the necessary steps to remove the sin from the church.

10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the person of Christ;

“To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also” – If the Corinthian church was satisfied that this man had genuinely repented and had forgiven him, then Paul says that he would also forgive this man.

“for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes *forgave I it*” – Whatever and whoever Paul forgave, he forgave it for the sake of the Corinthians. He did not want to fragment the church by continually excommunicating sinning believers. Rather, he wanted the church to grow and become stronger as sinning believers repented and were welcomed back into fellowship.

“in the person [lit. in the sight off; fig. in the presence of] of Christ” – None of this was done in a “back room” or “under-the-table.” Paul knew that he was accountable to Christ and that everything he did was subject to Christ’s authority. Thus, forgiving this man “in the presence (or sight) of Christ” indicates that it was done with Christ’s approval and authority.

11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Paul did not want there to be a foothold in the Corinthian church that Satan could take advantage of in order to destroy church unity. Not dealing with sin would give Satan a foothold to infiltrate the church with sin because “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6). On the other extreme, dealing with sin without love and forgiveness also creates a foothold for Satan to cause division and animosity inside and outside the church. Paul reminds the Corinthians that Satan’s tactics that he uses to weaken the church are not unknown.

Verses 12-17: Paul mentions that he had traveled to Troas (a city on west coast of Asia Minor) and, despite having the opportunity to minister there, his concern for the Corinthians compelled him to return to Macedonia (the area north of Corinth). Paul then celebrates the triumph they have in Christ (having heard of the Corinthians’ response to his rebukes) and declares that the gospel that they preached was not a corruption of the word of God but that they spoke sincerely in the name of Christ.