

SESSION 14: TIME TO FORGIVE, PART TWO

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

July 13, 2025

PREFACE

In preparation for this week's session I was reminded of a passage that ties in with the discussion of forgiveness with which we ended last week in our class. No less than Christ Jesus Himself affirms our conclusion in Luke 17.

Read Luke 17:1-4.

An unrepentant heart is to be rebuked; a repentant heart is to be forgiven. Jesus makes that pretty clear.

The passage before us—vv8-11—is all about obedience and forgiveness.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

Forgiveness is not exclusive to the church, but only in the church is it so prominent, such a foundational pillar of the community. For the church has been founded on the sacrifice of Christ where He forgave those who had crucified Him, and whereby in His atonement the sins of all may be forgiven. A church without forgiveness is not a “Christ-ian” church.

v8

Therefore I encourage you to reaffirm your love for him.

The expression of love (*agape*) within the body of Christ is no small thing to the apostle, and one can safely assume from the evidence at hand that the Corinth church was decidedly lacking in the familial love Paul preached. In his first letter we have his most eloquent treatise on the “greater gift” of love—not, as some have come to think, a treatise on romantic love, but on the expression of love as one of His gifts to the church—believer to believer—which is the context in which it is placed. Turn please to the end of First Corinthians 12.

For the previous thirty verses Paul has been patiently explaining to the church that God dispenses a *variety* of gifts to the church's members, and that they are *all* necessary and useful, both the flashier, more prominent gifts, and the more humble, even anonymous gifts. He closes this with a transition to what he refers to as "a more excellent way" in v31. As I read a portion of Chapter Thirteen, keep in mind that he is *not* speaking of the romantic love between a man and a woman. He begins with the fact that none of the more impressive gifts count for anything if they are absent love.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3.

The reason we commonly think of *agape* as the highest form of love is that it is the word of choice to describe God's relationship with man. Thus, just as God's grace, compassion, forgiveness represent the highest form of those concepts—so high they cannot remotely be compared to man's expression of them—*agape* represents the highest form of love, because it comes from, and is exemplified by, God. And we have the supreme expression of that love being demonstrated at the cross.

What does Paul mean by "a more excellent way" in 12:31? Love is not a gift *from* the Spirit, as in, for example, prophecy, helps, or tongues, but love is a *fruit of* the Spirit. That is, love is not the "best" gift; it is the best way to employ the gifts—"a more excellent way" to administer one's spiritual gifts.

A close examination of the words in vv4-7 reveals that the apostle is using irony (supposedly praising love) to actually blame the Corinthians for their behavior.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

All we need do is remove the "nots" to get a pretty accurate picture of the Corinthian church: they are jealous, envious, arrogant, they seek their own, they do take into account a wrong suffered, etc. "Rather than a hymn glorifying how wonderful love is, this text becomes a subtle commentary on what is rotten in Corinth" (Garland).

Our take-away from this is to keep the lessons being taught here squarely in the body of Christ. We can make extended application to other relationships, but Paul addresses here specifically how love is to be enacted in the church—or put another way, what love is to look like in the church. Now back to our text.

Although every one of our common versions add the word “your” to modify “love,” it is not in the original text. The *YLT* has it: “wherefore, I call upon you to confirm love to him.”

In v8 Paul is not just encouraging the church to embrace the offender with their own affection and consideration—to be nice to him—but, more importantly, to dispense *God’s* love upon him.

Seifrid: Love is a gift from God, indeed, the ultimate gift from God given in and through Jesus Christ, the new reality that is present within the church...nothing other than the love of God.

This does not mean that that love was lost during the period of discipline; the discipline itself was an act of love. But the church is now to reaffirm—although *kyrosai* is a legal or business term meaning to ratify or validate, here we might say the church was to more tangibly, more obviously express the love for the man that they had never lost.

v9

For to this end also I wrote, so that I might know your proven character, whether you are obedient in all things.

“For to this end also I wrote” refers to the previous “painful” letter. If in that letter he commanded them to forgive and restore the offending brother, his purpose in doing so was—in addition to that forgiveness and restoration—to test the character and obedience of the Corinthians.

Only Paul uses this word, *dokime*, in the NT. It refers to a process of testing, often in the form of an ordeal, used to demonstrate the nature of one’s character. He uses the same word in Chapter Eight in reference to the churches of Macedonia.

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-2.

And again in his letter to the Philippians regarding his disciple Timothy.

Read Philippians 2:22-23. 📖

Though Paul may be the only one to use this Greek word, we know that such testing is a regular tool in God's arsenal for "proving" the character of prophets before their ministry. We think of what Moses endured and, of course, Christ Himself. 📖

The "whether" (*ei*) makes clear that their obedience was not a foregone conclusion of Paul's; likewise, would they be obedient "in all things"? They must follow through to the end the discipline process; exclusion which produced repentance *must* be followed by forgiveness and restoration to the community. "Partial obedience is disobedience" (Guthrie).

Keep your finger in Philippians; we'll be back in a moment.

Although in the case of Jesus, it was not necessary for him to prove His worth and obedience to His Father; but His trial by temptation proved His obedience and faithfulness—obedience all the way to the cross—to those who would follow Him.

vv10-11

But one whom you graciously forgive anything, I graciously forgive also. For indeed what I have graciously forgiven, if I have graciously forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

Although it gets repetitive and pedantic here in the reading, we need to understand the importance of Paul's use of the word *charizomai* for "forgiveness" (just as he did in v7) instead of the more common *aphiemi*. Only the LSB acknowledges this with "graciously forgive." This "communicates the idea of giving something graciously or freely as a favor, to cancel a debt, or as here, to be gracious by forgiving someone for a wrong committed" (Guthrie).

Seifrid: Aphiemi [the more common word] communicates forgiveness through the metaphor of release, [while] *charizomai* normally signifies "giving," the free giving of gifts. Paul implicitly describes "for-give-ness" as an act of giving. The Corinthians are to "give" forgiveness to the offender, as Paul has done on their account as well.

But one whom you graciously forgive anything, I graciously forgive also.

The apostle Paul has demonstrated and will demonstrate in the future that he does not hold personal grudges. We see this, for one example, in the letter to the Philippians he will write later.

Read Philippians 1:15-18.

Here again he associates himself *with* the church—not just a voice of authority over it. Note v11, where he uses the pronouns “us” and “we”:

so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes. (emphasis added)

Paul emphasizes the community, the familial aspect of the church; the Corinthians are not free agents, but are a *family*—and he along with them. He too, as a part of the church, joins with them in graciously forgiving the disciplined brother.

For indeed what I have graciously forgiven, if I have graciously forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes... ➡

And even, in a manner of speaking, Paul’s forgiveness was not ultimately for the sake of the offender, but for the health of the church—the body of Christ. This is the pattern we see in Paul’s life: he remains faithful to his call. Jesus, through Ananias, tells Paul he is

**a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name.”
(Acts 9:15–16)**

And when the Jews rejected his and Barnabas’ ministry, they turned to the Gentiles.

**Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first. Since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.’”
(Acts 13:46–47)**

While it was certainly true that Paul loved individuals, his first love was Christ and His gospel (Philippians 3:12-14). His call was to spread that good news, and he did so by founding churches all over the known world. Individuals were important and dear to the apostle, but the health of the individual *churches* was paramount, for that was his chosen instrument for the spread of the gospel around the world.

And this is reinforced by the tag line—“...in the presence of Christ”—literally, in the “face” of Christ, meaning “in His presence.”

The second “graciously forgiven” is not in the original text, but has been added by the translators. YLT makes it, “And to whom ye forgive anything—I also.”

Guthrie: All that he does, he does with an attitude and posture reflecting that he is a man living under the lordship of Christ, before the living Christ as his audience, and for Christ's church.

This is a profound lesson for us all. Whatever we have been called to do we are to do wholeheartedly, devotedly, performing the work with excellence as if Christ were always there looking over our shoulder—because, *He is*. This is not optional. He is our Lord; we must answer and fulfill His commands and call. If He has chosen us out for anything—whatever it may be—our life is to remain fixed on that, in submission to our Lord's will.

v11

Earlier Paul gave the first reason for the church to extend forgiveness, comfort, and love to this brother: “lest such a one be swallowed up by sorrow,” risking losing him and his soul forever. Now the apostle gives a second reason:

...so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan,

Once again the ESV and NIVs are just a bit limp with their translation of *pleonekteo* (pleh-on-ek-teh'-o) as “would not be **outwitted**.” That translation is not wrong; it just does not quite capture the depth of meaning of the Greek. For that matter, neither do the other translations with “that no **advantage** would be taken,” although they come closer, especially by including the word “taken.” For the root of this Greek word means to have more, to be greedy, arrogant, to overreach and defraud, to cheat.

For example someone innocent in the ways of commercial bargaining might enter the shop of a wily retailer. The shopkeeper sees right off that the guy is a rube, so he deceitfully convinces the customer to not just buy something for twice what it is worth, but commits him to a long-term loan at an exorbitant interest rate. In one fell swoop the evil shopkeeper profits far more than what would be fair, and at the same time destroys the finances of the customer. That shopkeeper has just “*pleonekteo'd*” the buyer.

The apostle Peter warns us to “Be of sober spirit, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Satan is looking for every opportunity, large or small, to corrupt or takeover the church, to rip it apart, destroy its witness. Anything that weakens the integrity of the church—both the individual local church and the church universal—gives him entrance to do his worst.

In First Corinthians the church was guilty of winking at sin, of almost celebrating the licentious lifestyle of one of its parishioners. Satan already, it would seem, had full control of that man’s life, but this also gave Satan an incredible foothold in the local church and city community.

Now, in Second Corinthians, Paul fears the church will extend the discipline of another parishioner too far, thus permitting Satan entrance into not just the church, but that individual’s life, creating anger, resentment in him, and perhaps coaxing him away from Christ altogether.

For the individual believer the local church body is to be a bulwark against the evils of the secular world, as well as Satan himself. It is here the follower of Christ is to find encouragement, comfort, joy, sound counsel, and, yes, loving discipline when necessary.

But the church body has a responsibility, superintended by the leadership, first, to not permit sin to get a toe-hold in the body, and, second, to not carry discipline too far and too long against a repentant member.