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Forgiving the Offender

2: 5-11

The blessings of forgiveness DIG: Who was offended besides Paul? Why was it important for the Corinthian church to forgive and restore the repentant believer? What does this teach us about how we should respond to those who hurt us? How can spiritual leaders benefit from Paul's example? How does this passage apply to church discipline today?

REFLECT: Is there someone you need to forgive and comfort? Or would you just rather have an uneasy peace? Is it ok for a believer to be depressed? How much has Messiah forgiven you? What is the difference between forgiveness and trust? Is there someone whom you need to show mercy to? What is the four-step process that Satan uses to tempt you?

We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it.

Paul's "severe letter" proved to be effective in that **the Corinthians** did take strong disciplinary action against **the offender**. Having heard of the strong action taken, **Paul** was both relieved (**to see link click [BI](#) - The Effects of the Severe Letter**) and concerned.⁶⁸ **The Corinthians** obviously do not need **Paul** to tell **them** what happened, and dredging up the unhappy details might awaken the old feelings of anger again. The wounds were still healing, and rehearsing the events that caused **them** served no purpose. **The anonymous** person had repented.



Now if someone has been a cause of pain, it is not I whom he has pained, but, in some measure - I don't want to overstate it - all of you (2:5). The church as a whole, as well as **Paul**, had been affected. **He** had most likely rejected **Paul's** authority as an apostle, influenced greatly by **the false apostles** (see **Af - The Problem of the False Apostles**). When **Paul** learned about the offense, **he** protested loudly. **His** protest inflamed **the offender** and made **him** resentful, and **he**, in turn, protested against **Paul**. Loudly. When **Paul** arrived in person on **his** brief, unscheduled visit (see **Ae - Events Between First Corinthians and Second Corinthians**), **the offender** took the initiative to make **his** feeling known publicly to try to shame **Paul** in some way. The dispute, therefore, reached the boiling point with this public confrontation. It was either going to get better or go very, very badly, which might permanently destroy **Paul's** relationship with the church. **Paul** had no intention of forcing **the Corinthians** to fall in line because that would defeat **his** purpose of developing churches capable of standing on their own-two-feet and making mature decisions for themselves without constant supervision. So to keep the situation from blowing up, **Paul** left and went back to Ephesus. But **he** had no intention of sacrificing **his** core values for the sake of an uneasy peace. Nor would **he** ever give up on the church. Therefore, a stinging letter was the best solution because it gave **him** the opportunity to lay out the issues calmly. The ultimate goal was to bring about a peaceful resolution, not an unholy compromise.⁶⁹

Turning from the injury done, **Paul** declared: **The punishment** that had **already** been **imposed on him** by the church **was sufficient (2:6a)**. **He** had suffered enough, and it was time to show **him** mercy, and restore **him** to fellowship. **Punishment** (Greek: *epitimia*) appears only here in the B'rit Chadashah. Both its use in extra biblical Greek writings and the context of this passage suggest *epitimia* refers to an official disciplinary act **by the majority**: *excommunication* or *disfellowshipping*. The B'rit Chadashah teaches that the Church is to discipline

sinning believers (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gi - If Brother or Sister Sins, Go and Point Out Their Fault**). **Paul** had earlier dealt with another **sinning** member (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Ba - Failure to Discipline an Immoral Brother**).

But here, the **Corinthian** congregation had officially acted and put **the sinning individual** out of the church. Apparently that discipline had had its desired effect and **the man** repented. So it was time to **forgive** and restore **him**. In **Galatians 6:1** **Paul** commanded: **Brothers, suppose someone is caught doing something wrong. You who have the Spirit should set him right, but in a spirit of humility, keeping an eye on yourselves so that you won't be tempted also. He** encouraged **the Ephesians: Be kind to each other, tenderhearted; and forgive each other, just as in the Messiah God has also forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32)**. In **Colossians 3:13** he wrote that believers are to be characterized by **bearing with one another; if anyone has a complaint against someone else, forgive him. Indeed, just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive**. We are never more like **ADONAI** than when we show **forgiving** mercy to a repentant **sinner**.⁷⁰

Sorrowfully, confessing **his** tragic **sin** with Bathsheba, **David** acknowledged the sad reality that **sin** steals **joy**. He begged **ADONAI**, **“Restore my joy in your salvation, and rescue me from the guilt of shedding blood, God, God of my salvation! Then my tongue will sing about your righteousness” (Psalm 51:12 and 14)**. Confession and repentance restores **the joy** that **God** desires all believers to have (**John 15:11, 16:24, 17:12; Second John 12; Galatians 5:22**).

Some of **the Corinthians** believed that **the person** who had offended **Paul** needed to suffer further before being restored. But **Paul** disagreed, **he** knew what it was to be **depressed (1:8-9a and 4:8-10a)** and **he** didn't want to inflict *that* on anyone else unnecessarily. So **Paul** insisted **that now they should do the opposite - forgive him, encourage him, comfort him (2:6b)**. His pain had brought **him** to repentance, and now it was time to restore **his joy**. The church cannot set arbitrary limits on grace and mercy; it cannot reject a truly repentant person, no matter how serious the **sin**. If the church had failed to restore the repentant man, they would have sunk to the level of those who caused the problems in the first place. They would have been perpetuating a spirit of contention and division within the church.

Otherwise, Paul feared, **“such a person might be overwhelmed with**

depression” (2:7). This suggests that **Titus**, who had recently returned from **Corinth**, had probably observed that very real possibility and reported it to **Paul**. The word **overwhelmed** (Greek: *katapino*) is also used of animals who “devour” their prey, and of waves of water that “swallow up” people. **Paul** was afraid that **the offender**, if not **forgiven**, would drown in **his** sorrow.⁷² **Sinners** must pass through a period of despair, but the danger comes when **they** become permanently mired in gloom and lose all hope of **forgiveness**. Feeling that there is no way out can present an even worse danger to the soul.⁷³ Once again **Paul’s** pastoral concern emerges as **he** showed deep concern for **the offender’s** welfare. **He** wasn’t interested in revenge, all **he** wanted was restoration.

Fellowship is a place of grace, where mistakes aren’t rubbed in but rubbed out. Fellowship happens when mercy wins over justice. We all need mercy, because we all stumble and fall and require help getting back on track. We need to offer mercy to each other and be willing to receive it from each other. You can’t fellowship without **forgiveness**. **ADONAI** warns: **Never hold grudges (Colossians 3:13 LB)** because bitterness and resentment always destroy fellowship. Because we’re imperfect, **sinful** people, we inevitably hurt each other when we’re together for a long enough time. Sometimes we hurt each other intentionally and sometimes unintentionally, but either way, it takes massive amounts of mercy and grace to create and maintain fellowship. **You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others (Philippians 2:3-4 NCV).**

God’s mercy to us is the motivation for showing mercy to others. Remember, you will never be asked to **forgive** someone else more than **Ha’Shem** has already **forgiven** you. Whenever you are hurt by someone, you have a choice to make: Will I use my energy and emotions for revenge or restoration? You can’t do both. Many people are reluctant to show mercy because they don’t understand the difference between trust and **forgiveness**. **Forgiveness** is letting go of the past. Trust has to do with future behavior. **Forgiveness** is immediate, whether or not a person asks for it. Trust must be built over time. Trust requires a track record. If someone hurts you repeatedly, you are commanded by **God** to **forgive** them instantly, but you are not expected to continue allowing them to hurt you. They must prove they have changed over time. The best place to restore trust is within the supporting context of a small group that offers encouragement and accountability.⁷⁴

So I urge you to show that you really do love him (2:8). The centrality of **love**

in the life of believers emerges in this context. **Paul** wrote **his** earlier letter to **the Corinthians** that **they** might know **his love** for **them (2:4)**. Now **he encourages them** to show **their love** to this **man** who had wronged **Paul**, and whom **Paul** had **forgiven**. This practical, all-too-human situation provided an opportunity for all parties: **apostle** and **people**, to display **love**, the most important **fruit** (see the commentary on [Galatians Bw - The Fruit of the Ruach is Love](#)), **the way** of excellence, which is the mark of the believer and the fulfillment of the “new commandment” of **Yeshua, fulfilling the Torah’s true meaning (John 13:34-35; First Corinthians 9:21; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14 and 6:2)**.⁷⁵

Paul now shifts **his** attention from **the offender** to **the Corinthians themselves**. While it was true that “the severe letter’s” purpose was to demand disciplinary action against **the offender**, this demand was also intended to **test the Corinthians’ obedience**. **The reason I wrote you was to see if you would pass the test, to see if you would fully obey me (2:9)**. What **Paul** expected was not **obedience** to **him** personally, but **obedience** to the gospel and its implications. It is significant that throughout **his** letters **Paul** consistently bases **his** ethical demands first on the principles of the gospel, not upon **his** personal authority. It was to the gospel and its implications that believers must be **obedient**.⁷⁶

Paul then called upon **his** readers to **forgive the offender**. **Paul’s** agreement with **the majority’s** decision to **forgive the offender** demonstrated **his** humility. **He** did not agree with the “Paul party” who wanted **the man** to suffer more. **Indeed, Paul** had already **forgiven him if**, he added, **there has been anything to forgive**. Once again, **the apostle** downplayed the offense against **him**. **His** primary concern was for the fellowship to be restored and for there to be unity in the **Corinthian** church. Therefore, reinforcing the solidarity between **the apostle** and **the Corinthians**, **Paul** declared: **Anyone you forgive, I forgive too (2:10a)**.

Paul lived **his** whole life **in the presence of the Messiah (2:10b)**, aware that **the Lord** knew **his** every thought, word, and deed. Later in this chapter **he** reminded **the Corinthians** that **he** spoke **standing in God’s presence (2:17)**. **He** declared that **he didn’t try to trick anyone or distort the word of God**. **He** emphasized to **the Corinthians** that **he told the truth before God, and all who are honest knew that (4:2 NLT)**. To **Timothy** he wrote: **I solemnly charge you before God and the Messiah Yeshua, who will judge the living and the**

dead when he appears and establishes his Kingdom: proclaim the Word! Be on hand with it whether the time seems right or not. Convict, censure and exhort with unfailing patience and with teaching (Second Timothy 4:1-2). Paul eagerly forgave the one who had offended **him** because **Messiah**, in whose **presence he** constantly lived, had fully **forgiven him**.⁷⁷

Finally, to withhold **forgiveness** when **the man** was repentant was to play right into the hands of **the master strategist, Satan. So that we will not be taken advantage of by the Adversary.** It helps to know that **he** is entirely predictable. **He** has used the same strategy and old tricks since the Creation. All temptations follow the same pattern. That's why **Paul** said: **For we are quite aware of his schemes (2:11-12)!** From the Bible we learn that temptation follows a **four-step process**, which **the Lawless One** used on both **Adam and Eve** and on **Yeshua**.

In step one, **the Dragon** identifies a **desire** inside of you. It may be a **sinful** desire, like the desire to get revenge or to control others, or it may be a legitimate, normal desire, like the desire to be loved or valued or to feel pleasure. Temptation starts when **the Tempter** suggests (with a thought) that you give in to an evil desire, or that you fulfill a legitimate desire in a wrong way or at the wrong time. Always be aware of shortcuts. They are often temptations! **The Evil One** whispers, "You deserve it! You should have it now! It will be exciting . . . comforting . . . or make you feel better!" We think that temptation lies outside of us, but **ADONAI** says it begins within us. If you didn't have the internal desire, the temptation could not attract you. Temptation always starts in your mind, not in your circumstances. **Yeshua** said: **For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within (Mark 7:21-23 NLT).** And **James** tells us that there is **a whole army of evil desires within you (James 4:1 LB).**

Step two is **doubt. The Deceiver** tries to get you to doubt what **YHVH** has said about **sin**: Is it really wrong? Did **God** really say not to do it? Didn't **God** mean not to do this for someone else or some other time? Doesn't **God** want me to be happy? But the Bible warns: **Watch out! Don't let evil thoughts or doubts make any of you turn from the living God (Hebrews 3:12 CEV).**

Step three is **deception. The Wicked One** is incapable of telling **the truth** and is called **the father of lies (John 8:44).** Anything **he** tells you will be untrue or just half-true. **The old Serpent** offers his lie to replace what **YHVH** has already said in

His Word. The Angel of Light says, “You will not die. You are more wise than **God**. You can get away with it. No one will ever know. It will solve all your problems. Besides, everyone else is doing it. It’s only a little **sin**.” But a little **sin** is like being a little pregnant. It will eventually show itself!

Step four is **disobedience**. You finally act on the thought you’ve been toying with in your mind. What began as an idea got birthed into behavior. You give in to whatever got your attention. You believe the lies of **the Enemy** and fall into the trap that **James** warns us about: **We are tempted when we are drawn away and trapped by our own evil desires. Then our evil desires conceive and give birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my dear friends (James 1:14-16 TEV)!**

It’s not a **sin** to be **tempted**. **Yeshua** was **tempted**, yet **He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15)**. **Temptation** only becomes a **sin** when you give in to **it**. Martin Luther (1483-1546), the German theologian who started the Protestant Reformation, said, “You can’t keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.” You can’t keep **the Devil** from suggesting thoughts, but you can choose not to dwell or act on them.⁷⁸