

Restoring a Broken Relationship

(2 Corinthians 7:2-10)

Broken relationships are one of the most painful experiences in life. It might be a declining marriage relationship. It might be problems in a parent-child relationship. It might be losing a friendship that has taken years or a lifetime to develop. Even more painful is when that friend is a fellow believer. **Restoring a broken relationship** requires at least three actions, beginning with ...

Reopen your heart (7:2-4).

Paul wants to restore his relationship with the Corinthians. He writes, *Make room in your hearts for us* (7:2a). This repeats his plea in 6:13. The phrase *in your hearts* is not in the Greek text, which simply reads "receive us," as it is in the KJV. The word translated *make room*, or "receive," (CHOREO, cho-reh'-o) means "to give space." Paul is asking the Corinthians to welcome him and his co-workers with their *hearts*. Maybe you have been deeply hurt by someone, and you say, "I can't reopen my heart to them." Yes, you can! Why, according to Philippians 4:13?

To dispel any misgivings that might hinder the Corinthians from opening their hearts to Paul and his associates, Paul writes, *We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one* (7:2). In other words, Paul and his associates have not led anyone astray. They have not been "prophets-for-profit," exploiting people for financial gain.

Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to misinterpret his defense of his integrity, so he writes, *I do not say this to condemn you* (7:3a). Paul is not angry, and he is not giving up on his readers. He is rebuking their sin and rebellion and calling on them to repent. Paul is a wonderful example of what principle in 1 Peter 4:8?

Paul continues, *for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together* (7:3b). This means neither death nor the trials of life, including the harsh things said about him, would change his love for the Corinthian believers. Paul's love for them is unconditional.

Because he is confident the Corinthians will do the right thing, Paul writes: *I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort* (7:4a-c). Though his readers are far from ideal believers, Paul is proud of them and believes in them. This is because of what truth about love in 1 Corinthians 13:7b-c?

The next two phrases are very surprising. Paul writes, *In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy* (7:4d-e). Despite all the problems his readers have caused him, they are a source of overflowing joy. The Corinthians are not who they should be, but they are nothing like who they were before Paul led them to Christ.

To restore a broken relationship, **reopen your heart**. Then ...

Refocus on the person's good qualities (7:5-7).

To get the Corinthians to refocus on his love for them, Paul writes, *For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest* (7:5a-b). Here Paul resumes the story he began in 2:12-13. He left some great evangelistic opportunities in Troas to meet Titus in Macedonia (northern Greece) and receive a report about the Corinthians. Paul could not rest when Titus wasn't there. He wanted to know how they had received his first letter. He *had no rest* from this burden, so it drained the joy out of his ministry. His experience reflects what truth in Proverbs 13:12a?

Dashed hope makes our hearts sick and poisons our relationships. Here is an important proverb for parents: *Don't make promises to your children you do not keep*. For example, "We'll go to Disney World next year." or "I'll buy you that later." When you continually raise your children's or grandchildren's hopes about something and then don't carry through, they will likely become resentful. The number one cause of children's resentment toward parents is broken promises.

Paul also writes he and his associates *were afflicted at every turn* (7:5c). Apparently, Paul continued to have problems in Macedonia from those who wanted to persecute him, causing *fighting without and fear within* (7:5d). His *fear* was because he was concerned for Titus and the situation at Corinth. How does God comfort him (7:6)?

Paul continues, *and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more* (7:7). Titus reports the Corinthians responded as Paul had hoped to his first letter of rebuke. Titus tells Paul they are *longing* to see him and are *mourning*, or "sorry" about, their sin and behavior toward Paul. The word translated *zeal*, or "fervent mind," (ZELOS, zay·-los) refers to passionate love.

Jesus demonstrates this kind of *zeal* when He drives the money changers from the temple (Jn 2:13-16). After this incident, His disciples remember a passage from Psalm 69:9 (Jn 2:17a). How is this quoted in John 2:17b?

The *zeal* the Corinthians now have for Paul will defend him from further attacks on his reputation.

To restore a broken relationship, **reopen your heart, refocus on the person's good qualities**, and ...

Repent of any bitterness or hurt (7:8-10).

At first, the Corinthians were bitter because of Paul's strong rebuke of their behavior. Therefore, Paul writes, *For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it- though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while* (7:8). Paul is not sorry he wrote the first severe letter, even though he did regret it at first. He knows it was only painful to them *for a while*. Paul is rejoicing over the outcome (7:9a). Why (7:9b)?

Paul continues, *For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us* (7:9c-d). Godly grief is the kind of grief God desires because it leads to repentance.

No one who truly repents will ever regret the *grief* that led to their repentance. That's why Paul writes, *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death* (7:10). The Corinthians did not grieve because they got caught in sin or their pride was wounded. Their *godly grief* produced true *repentance*.

Biblical repentance is not just being emotionally sorry for your sins, even though sorrow is a symptom of true repentance. Also, it is not just being overwhelmed with guilt, like Judas Iscariot (Mt 27:5), even though that is another a symptom. The word translated repentance (METANOEO , meta- no'-oh) in the New Testament refers to a radical turning from sin to God. It is an experience in which God becomes the controlling Force in our lives. What does Jesus command about the results of true repentance (Matthew 3:8)?

The *fruit of repentance* is a fundamental life change. It is a complete change of mind about sin and God. Our former sin becomes repugnant to us. Do you know why God doesn't judge our sin immediately? He wants us to repent.

To understand this truth, personalize Romans 2:4:

To restore a broken relationship, **reopen your heart, refocus on the person's good qualities**, and **repent of any bitterness or hurt**.