

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 2

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 2: 1-17

1. Sexual Immorality and Forgiveness: v. 1-11

The wrongdoer, whom Paul mentions in this chapter, was one of the sources of grief to Paul. In the first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul pointed out this sexual immorality and demanded the church to expel the perpetrator from the congregation [I Corinthians 5: 1-5]. Paul was so grieved about this immoral act and its effect on the church that he wanted the church to eliminate the source of the immorality by expelling the person. Verse 5 tells us Paul's state of mind when he wrote the first letter about this immorality. He says, "I wrote unto you with many tears; not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you." Love towards this church was the motive in Paul's heart when he admonished so strongly about this case of immorality in his first letter.

In the second chapter of the second letter, however, we sense that the situation has been turned around much. Paul is now exhorting the congregation to forgive the perpetrator. How could Paul's attitude towards this sexually immoral person be changed so drastically?

Let us first review the law about the particular offense in the Mosaic Law to see what punishment was specified for it.

The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. [Leviticus 20:11]

So, this perpetrator and the woman were meet to be stoned to death according to the Mosaic Law. Here, we need to be reminded that there were three categories of laws in the Mosaic Law system:

- 1) Moral laws in the form of the Ten Commandments: These are still applicable to the Christians today.
- 2) Ceremonial laws: These laws were applicable to the Jewish people during OT era and have been abrogated under the NT covenant system.
- 3) Civic laws: These laws have been absorbed into the legal systems of the nations.

Although most of the Mosaic Law clauses are no longer applicable to modern day Christians, we are still bound by the Ten Commandments according to the "Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)," except the question of keeping the Sabbath. This is in line with Pauline interpretation of the Mosaic Law.

The sexually immoral act, which was the subject of issue here, pertains to a moral law clause. Therefore, the case is under the jurisdiction of the church. What is at issue here is what to do with this case of immorality in the congregation. In this sense, sexual immorality is a very pertinent issue in Christian congregations today.

Paul describes the state of this perpetrator in verse 6, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." Paul seems to believe that this man is already contrite for what he has done and the grief that his immoral act caused in the congregation and the ministers. No doubt members of the congregation have expressed concern, some in edifying ways and others in not-so-gentle ways. And this man has been afflicted much from all the attention he has been receiving from the congregation. Apparently, he has continued his attendance in the church because he does not want to lose his salvation. That is why Paul believes that the congregation should forgive him as in verse 7, "You ought to forgive him and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." God is a just God and demands a holy people for Himself. Yet, when people sin and comes to Him in repentance, He extends His mercy and forgiveness. Paul exhibits such love of God to this offender and wants the congregation to do the same.

Forgiving spirit is a way of manifesting the love of Christ. Of course, forgiveness is merited only when an offender has repented and wants to be made right before God. Based on this evidence, Paul exhorts the

brethren to show their love to this man [v. 7]. And he says he will forgive any offender whom they forgive. This lays down a principle of how a Christian church should administer church discipline under the following guidelines taught by the Lord [Matt 18:15-17]:

- 1) An attempt should be made to correct an offender in private by one or two persons.
- 2) If uncorrected, the offense needs to be made known to an elder who admonishes
- 3) After given sufficient warning and time for repentance, if the offender does not repent, the case should be placed before the congregation for judgment.
- 4) If the offender is not corrected, he/she shall be expelled from the congregation.

2. Sweet Aroma from Living Sacrifice: v. 12-17

In verse 15 Paul writes, “we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” Here, “we” refers to the servants of God. To the Jewish people, “sweet savor” is understood as the savor of the sacrificed animal when it is burned on the altar in the temple of God. Paul is acutely aware that this aroma or savor is associated with a sacrifice. As he lays down his life as Christ did His on the altar of service for God, he is conscious that God smells the sweet aroma coming up from the burning lives of His servants in great pleasure.

Paul wrote to the Roman Christians about our worship through offering ourselves as a living sacrifice:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. [Romans 12:1-2]

Why does Paul write about the sweet aroma to the Corinthian Christians at this juncture? He just wrote about forgiving the previous sexual offender who had caused so much grief in the church. And he realizes the church’s sense of proper worship needs to be set right. Thus, he is encouraging the Corinthian church to live in holy and acceptable way so that their lives as living sacrifices could bring sweet pleasing aroma to God.

Worship to modern day Christians often mean exciting music to stir up people’s hearts and minds. Paul’s definition of worship is much different from the contemporary definition. Our worship needs to be “holy and acceptable” to God. What we decide to perform in a worship session may only bring displeasure to God if it is not holy and acceptable to God. This point demands serious consideration by both pastors and congregations.

Discussion topics:

1. *How tolerant should a Christian church be towards sexual immorality in the believers? If you see an immoral behavior such as extra-marital affair in a fellow congregant, what action would you take?*
2. *How can a Christian’s life be compared to an animal sacrifice being burned on the temple altar? How relevant is this analogy today?*