

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

### **Sermon Series: Jesus' GLORIOUS New Way**

(Studies in 2 Corinthians 1-4)

### **The Beautiful Grace of Restoration**

(2 Corinthians 1:1-12--2:11)

Study #2

#### **Introduction: To give up to rust or bring in to restore...**

You and I find ourselves in a very weird car market these days.

The norm, for generations, has been to buy a car, new or used, and keep it for a few years.

Then, when the car starts having problems - parts wear out, lots of creaks and groans, a few dings and dents - we trade it in for a newer or even a brand-new model. That has been the norm.

Today, though, with cars - new and used - selling for really high prices (and, as you know, some used cars are selling for more than their new counterparts), car owners are opting for a new norm.

Lots of us are simply keeping our cars longer than normal. We replace what's worn out. We fix what's broken. We restore.

A car that's got a lot of miles, has been driven hard, and may even have a few dents and dings, gets fixed to provide more years of service on the road.

I was recently faced with the decision about what to do with my Ranger truck. It needed some work. The decision was whether to fix it or buy a newer model.

Noting the prices of newer models, I opted to get it fixed and took it to my favorite mechanic.

Well, he went to work on my truck, replacing the whole clutch assembly, the timing chain, a lot of front-end suspension parts, and the whole A/C system.

At the end, I had a great-running truck and paid a fraction of what it would have cost to buy a new one.

I loved going that route, and for lots of reasons. Chief among them is that restoring a vehicle that needed some work is such a great picture of what God is doing with each one of us.

All of us who belong to Jesus have at the least suffered some wear and tear.

We may have a bit of body damage. Due to potholes, we list to the right or left. We may even have something major going on. Using car language, it would be on the order of needing a new transmission or an engine overhaul.

But rather than toss us into a people junkyard, God fixes us up.

He restores us. He may not fix every ding or dent, and we might still walk with a limp. But, thanks to His commitment to restoration, we can provide more years of service for Him and can serve others in Jesus' Name.

Today, we are going to consider God's work of restoring human wrecks, a work that is central to the mission of this and every church.

For this work, we don't need jacks or jack stands, wrenches or gear pullers. The necessary tools are love, grace, and the confidence that God wants to use us to help others take next steps with Jesus.

This morning marks our second study in Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth.

Last Sunday, we considered pain and its benefits. Today, we are thinking about restorative love.

To review... (1:3-11)

The Apostle Paul - who knew something about pain - told us that if we turn to Jesus when we are in pain, He will turn that pain into something good. Something redemptive.

He will comfort and strengthen us in our pain so that we can offer comfort to others who are in pain. AND He will use pain to grow our faith.

Only a good God *would* do such a thing. Only a powerful God *could*. And that was the message our first look at 2 Corinthians.

Paul follows those comments about pain with some wonderful, warm, affirmation. The words we read next are really friendly.

To affirm... (1:12-14)

***[12] For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you. [13] For we write nothing else to you than what you read and understand, and I hope you will understand until the end; [14a] just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud...***

Paul and Silas and Timothy were the Corinthians' spiritual parents, and Paul the newer believers in Corinth to be proud of them.

He wanted them to remember that when they had all been together, the apostolic crew had always behaved "above reproach."

They hadn't taken advantage of anybody. They had only wanted to promote holiness, spiritual growth, and maturity in Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

For his part, Paul says that he is proud of them, too.

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<sup>1</sup> This is especially significant when we realize that the Corinthians had ample opportunity to observe Paul during his eighteen-month-long stay in Corinth.

***[14b]...we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, on the day of our Lord Jesus.***

There were things going on in the church at Corinth that brought fatherly pride to Paul. And we'll get to that in a minute.

But, following these loving words, Paul transitions to, of all things, a detailed explanation of his travel plans.

If that sounds a little odd to you, I get that. But it is exactly what he did.

### **Apostolic Travel Deviations (1:15--2:4)**

#### **Shifting Travel Plans (1:15-22)**

*Actual itinerary*

I'll not go into a lot of detail about his travels.

But I will tell you that Paul and his traveling companions went from Corinth to Ephesus to Jerusalem to Antioch to Ephesus to Corinth to Philippi...to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

That's an outline of Paul's travels. It's what he did. But that is NOT what he said he was going to do.

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<sup>2</sup> Starting with Paul's first visit to Corinth recorded in Acts, we know that he went with Silas and Timothy to Ephesus for a short visit. Then it was on to Jerusalem and back to Antioch for some R&R. Then he traveled back to Ephesus for an extended stay, where he wrote 1 Corinthians. When the courier returned from having delivered that first letter Paul was confronted with the serious problems that still existed in the church there, and with the outbreak of new ones. These new developments required that Paul personally travel to Corinth from Ephesus to deal with the problem, a visit not recorded, but implied, in 2 Corinthians. (That is why Paul can make reference to wanting to come to Corinth "a third time" in 2 Cor. 12:14; 2 Cor. 13:1.) The second visit was a tough one, marked by confrontation. Paul returned to Ephesus from Corinth and sent a stinging letter of rebuke that was mailed "*with tears*" (this is a letter we don't have, written in-between 1 and 2 Corinthians and referred to in 2 Cor. 2:3-4). Following the end of his Ephesian ministry, Paul traveled to Philippi. Then he and his companions went to Jerusalem.

### *Stated itinerary*

Earlier, he had evidently told the Corinthians that he was going to travel from Corinth to Philippi (which he did) and that he would then go back to Corinth (which he did not do).

His detractors in Corinth said that this change in plans proved that Paul wasn't a man of his word.

### *Accusation of vacillation*

*"That Paul - he lacks character. You just can't depend on him to do what he says he's going to do. He alters his travel itinerary without telling. He's shiftless and no account. Don't trust a word he says about anything, even what he says about Jesus..."*

But Paul says that there were reasons why he had not gone back to Corinth that third time. Two reasons, in fact.<sup>3</sup>

### **Two Reasons for Paul's Travel Plan Shift (1:23--2:4)**

#### *#1 - Because Paul is not Lord*

***[23] But I call God as witness to my soul, that it was to spare you that I did not come again to Corinth. [24] Not that we domineer over your faith<sup>4</sup>, but we are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.***

As an apostle, Paul had the right to exercise some measure of authority in the churches. But he wasn't any church's boss. Jesus was and is Lord of the church at Corinth, our church, and every other church.

But there was something Paul wanted the church at Corinth to do, to take care of.

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<sup>3</sup> He went to bat for his reputation in Corinth, not because he had concern for what people thought about him, but because what they thought about him would impact the way they thought about the message of the Gospel.

<sup>4</sup> See 1 Peter 5:3; Romans 14:4; 1 Tim. 6:15; Ephesians 4:5.

And if he had gone from Philippi back to Corinth for a third time, he would have been putting himself in a position of forcing the church to take the action he wanted them to take.

That would have been ***"to domineer over"*** them. Paul was unwilling to do that.

He didn't go back to Corinth that third time because he wanted to leave them to deal with the matter before God, without his involvement.<sup>5</sup> No bossing them around. No apostolic nagging.

And there was another reason for not traveling to Corinth. He didn't want to bring them sorrow.

#### *#2 - To NOT bring sorrow (2:1-4)<sup>6</sup>*

***[1] But I decided this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.<sup>7</sup> [2] For if I cause you sorrow, who then will be the one making me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?<sup>8</sup>***

Things were in such a crisis state in Corinth after his second "sorrowful" visit that if Paul had gone back there from Philippi - like he said he was going to do - it would have been a scold fest.

Paul chose to not drop in on the Corinthians to avoid being harsh and causing sorrow AND to give the church the chance to correct problems on their own, with only the prompting of God.

So, what was going on in Corinth? What's the big deal?

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<sup>5</sup> It wasn't that Paul was opposed to being directive. You could turn to passages in his letters where he is VERY directive.

<sup>6</sup> This is an unfortunate chapter division, for there is no break in Paul's thought.

<sup>7</sup> This clearly indicates that Paul had already made that sorrowful, second visit.

<sup>8</sup> ***[3] This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy was the joy of you all. [4] For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.***

Paul tells us what the big deal was. It was a real-life situation involving a real, live person.

### **Love That Restores (vv. 5-11)**

#### **The Sorrow Caused by One (v. 5)**

***[5] But if anyone has caused sorrow, he<sup>9</sup> has caused sorrow not for me, but in some degree - not to say too much - for all of you.***

*Who is this guy and what did he do?*

The “**anyone**” here is not named. But the Corinthians knew who Paul was talking about. So do we.

There was a man - a Christian man who was a part of the Corinthian church<sup>10</sup> - who was involved in an immoral relationship. He was involved with his father’s wife. Not his mother, his stepmother.<sup>11</sup>

This kind of immorality explicitly violated Old Testament commands, which doesn’t surprise us.<sup>12</sup> You may be surprised, though to learn that even among the Corinthians, this type of activity would have been considered deviant, perverse.<sup>13</sup>

*The butterfly effects of sin*

This man’s behavior had caused sorrow to Paul, personally. He also caused sorrow to the entire church, because it is always the case that in a church, our actions affect others.<sup>14</sup>

You’ve heard of the “butterfly effect.” In chaos theory (a branch of mathematics), the butterfly effect is the idea that a very small movement can start a chain reaction that causes huge effects.

The example often given is of a butterfly flapping its wings in west Africa, which puts in motion a little wind that grows and becomes a hurricane over the Atlantic.

Well, there is a “butterfly” effect in the Body of Christ, where the actions of one person impacts the whole.

Your involvement in ministry benefits everybody. Your gossip hurts everybody. A break in your friendship with another person affects all relationships. Your reconciliation with that friend will impact the whole church for good.

For good or ill, your actions impact those around you in the church. The actions of others in the church affect you.

This Corinthian brother was deeply involved in sin. The tentacles of that sin have touched the whole church and have damaged the witness of the church in Corinth.

So, what’s a church to do when a believer sins, and continues in that sin, unrepentant?

Well, that church is to take bold action. And by the time Paul wrote this letter, the church in Corinth had already taken that action.

#### **Strong, Loving Action by the Church (vv. 6-10)**

*Punish (v. 6)*

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<sup>9</sup> Most scholars have equated this man, as I do, with the brother who was guilty of sexual immorality, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5.

<sup>10</sup> The fact that discipline was brought to bear on this individual proves that he was a Christian, as the church has no business disciplining non-believers.

<sup>11</sup> “**His father’s wife**” almost certainly doesn’t mean “his mother” or Paul would have said so. (See 1 Corinthians 5:1).

<sup>12</sup> [**Leviticus 18:8**] **You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father’s wife; it is your father’s nakedness.** Stoning was the OT punishment for this crime.

<sup>13</sup> We don’t know if the woman was currently married to the man’s father, if she was divorced from his father, or if she was widowed. What is clear is that there is an on-going, unrepented of, sinful relationship between the man and this woman.

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<sup>14</sup> Centuries ago, the English poet, John Donne, wrote, “*No man is an island*” and he was right. The actions of one always impact the broader world. And what is true, globally, is even more true in the life of the church.

**[6] Sufficient for such a person is this punishment which was imposed by the majority<sup>15</sup>**

In the first letter (1 Corinthians) Paul urged that the church disfellowship the man, that they remove him from the church.

This was something that Paul himself had done, spiritually speaking, from Ephesus. He did it, acting in his role as an apostle.

He wanted the Corinthians to do the same there in Corinth, in person.

(But the way, it was this action that assures us that the man in question was a Christian. Paul would have never urged the church to exercise discipline against an unbeliever.)

The church took Paul's words to heart and dis-fellowshipped him. (the term "excommunicate" is sometimes used). This was what Paul had been hoping the church would do in his absence.

Remember, he had refused to go back to Corinth for the third time, hoping that the church would take this action without him pressuring them to do so.

They did it. It was the right thing to have done. Jesus said so.

We should all know that it wasn't "mean old Paul" who came up with a plan for dealing with an unrepentant, sinning Christian. The whole thing was the idea of the most loving Man who ever lived.

The Lord Jesus envisioned a situation just like this arising in His church. So, He prepared His disciples with a plan.

***[Matthew 18:15] "Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. [16] But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that ON THE TESTIMONY OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY MATTER MAY BE CONFIRMED. [17] And if he***

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<sup>15</sup> It appears that not everybody was on board with the discipline. Were there some who didn't think it was the right thing to do? This would not be surprising.

***refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."***

There are steps to be taken, in order, when a believer sins.

First, there is to be personal, private, reproof. Then, confrontation before a couple of witnesses. Then, public admonishment. Finally, in the absence of repentance, disfellowshipping.

The church of Corinth took that final step in the discipline process, and that is a hard step to take. We know that here at Northwest. We have followed this process at times, over the years. Yet, that last step must sometimes be taken.

Not many of us enjoy moving through this process of discipline. The whole idea of confronting a good friend for misbehavior has never been popular.

So, of course, it is threatening to do this. Yes, it's a challenge to our courage. And, yes, it is usually a fearful thing to approach a friend - not with a complaint that they have irritated you - but with an honest rebuke because they have sinned.

But the fact that this sort of interaction is challenging is no excuse to not engage in it. A distaste for rebuke doesn't exempt any of us from occasionally filling the role of the prophet Nathan who called a sinful King David on the carpet.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, if you are a part of Northwest Community Church you have signed up to participate in this process.

That's part of what it means when we say that we "*help others take next steps with Jesus.*" (Our Mission Statement)

When you become aware that your brother or your sister is acting or speaking sinfully, you are to talk with them about it.

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<sup>16</sup> See 2 Samuel 12, and the prophet, Nathan's rebuke of David after his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah.

It is always a painful thing to do, but such engagements are crucial if the church is to flourish.

And in a church where the first step of discipline is routinely carried out, where we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) with each other as a matter of course, problems often get nipped in the bud.

When it doesn't happen, problems fester and grow. But Corinth, the problem church, had come through like a champ. And the church's severe action had produced the desired result.

The Christian man had repented of his sin and was truly sorrowful about his past misdeeds.

Paul's next words urge the church to bring the restoration cycle full circle.

*Forgive (v. 7)*

***[7] so that on the other hand, you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a person might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.***

Paul calls the church to forgive. Let the past stay in the past.

We are often tempted to get hysterical over sins committed by people we know and love. That's generally not the best way to handle things. But we can also get historical, and that's also unhelpful.

What is appropriate - and more than that, what is BEAUTIFUL - is for us to learn to say to the one who has sinned, has been disciplined, and has repented:

*"I will not let my dealings with be governed by your past offenses. You are forgiven."*

That's right. Forgive - and then love. Don't delay. Run, don't walk. As fast as you can, show the repentant brother or sister the love they need.

*Love (v. 8)*

***[8] Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.***

Tell him that you love him. Show her that you love her. Include him or her in your get-togethers and group texts, just for the fun of it. Call, out of the blue. Just to talk.

Extend the right hand of fellowship and give a warm embrace. No standoffishness.

Then, restore.

*Restore (v. 9-10)*

***[9] For to this end I also wrote, so that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. [10] But one whom you forgive anything, I also forgive; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did so for your sakes in the presence of Christ***

By these words about forgiveness, I picture a party, complete with a fattened calf, a ring, new shoes and a fancy robe - just like the scene in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.

As many of my commentaries have suggested, Paul is probably envisioning a public gathering of the church for a special celebration of restoration.

During the entire time of this brother's dis-fellowshipping until the repentance, this brother had been effectively removed from the life of the church. With repentance, though, all barriers get dropped.

The restoring church is to be like the prodigal son's father, waiting with outstretched arms to welcome him (or her) back.

It is scandalous when a church allows flagrant sin to continue unaddressed in the Body of Christ.

It is just as scandalous to not restore someone to warm, full-fledged fellowship in the church after repentance. Church discipline that isn't aimed at repentance and restoration isn't Christian.

The end goal of any act of discipline is to bring a brother or a sister who has strayed to full restoration, to service for the Lord again. It is to put that Christian back in circulation.

When repentance occurs, fellowship is restored, love is affirmed, sanctions are dropped, and the way back is clear for renewed ministry.

Paul ends this section with a pretty provocative comment.

### **The Schemes of Satan (v. 11)**

***[11] so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan<sup>17</sup>; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.<sup>18</sup>***

#### *Taken advantage of by Satan*

If you are a believer in Jesus, you have an enemy. He has declared unholy war against you. And it is quite personal. After all, you love God, and he hates God.

THEREFORE...he hates you. Satan is *“the hater of your soul.”*<sup>19</sup>

His goal is to trip you up by whatever means he can. And he is quite canny.

He has been around a long time. He knows God’s people, our weaknesses, and how the game is played. He knows what is likely to work as he seeks to take advantage of us.

If he can neutralize the witness of a church or of a Christian, well, that is Mission Accomplished.

Paul brings Satan into the discussion here for a reason.

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<sup>17</sup> “Satan” - the word means “adversary”

<sup>18</sup> Paul discusses Satan’s activity throughout 2 Corinthians more than in any of his other letters.

<sup>19</sup> Many thanks to former Northwest member and good friend, Hadley Reed, for this name for Satan.

It is powerful and God-honoring and redemptive when we deal with each other in the way he has described for us today. Satan will do everything in his power to derail us off of that course.

#### *Not ignorant of his schemes*

#### Not taking sin seriously

On the one hand, he might tempt us to not take sin seriously, to dismiss it as no big deal, to sweep it under the rug, and to not confront.

Or, realizing that it is a big deal, he might tempt church leaders to think, *“Let’s not get involved. We might get sued. It’ll get messy.”*

Of course, it’ll get messy.

But if we refuse to address clear-cut sin issues, or to deal with each other as Jesus directs us to in Matthew 18, we are showing that we really don’t care much if our brother or sister grows in grace.

When we are that disinterested, Satan has already won.

#### Not forgiving wholeheartedly

Another path for Satan to follow for an evil win is for him to successfully tempt us to not extend grace and forgiveness to the Christian who repents.

Our enemy doesn’t want us to reconcile after confrontation. He wants us to maintain distance, to add bricks to the wall. That is the polar opposite of the grace Jesus calls us to give.

Forgiveness. It is what I think is the high-water mark of Christian discipleship.

If we don’t forgive and reconcile and restore, we are just revealing how little we appreciate the forgiveness God has given us.

When we do forgive, we unleash God’s life-changing power.

**Conclusion:**

I went the route of fixing up my truck recently and got a perfectly serviceable vehicle in return.

I tell that story not to tell you what to do with your own jalopy, but to highlight that it is possible to restore something that's got some hard miles on it.

God chooses to not toss out those of us who have some hard miles and a few dents. When we break down, He doesn't go out and make new things. No. He makes the things that are, new. He renews and restores. (Revelation 21:5)

Christians, by definition, are people who have been recovered by God. We were lost - but have been found by God's amazing grace, poured out on us in Jesus.

Christians are also people who are continually in need of repair. We always need Him to fix us up. And He loves to use His Church, to aid in the restoration process.

A church living up to the name "CHURCH" is a mechanic's shop where people who have been wrecked by others, by life, or by their own choices get restored to His beautiful design and purpose.

Lots of work, sure. But so worth it.