

# Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

[www.sermonaudio.com/crc](http://www.sermonaudio.com/crc)

[www.unholycharade.com](http://www.unholycharade.com)

[www.lightfordarktimes.com](http://www.lightfordarktimes.com)

## *God's Word to a Hesitating Church*

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

*“Sin, Pain, Repentance, and Restoration in the Body of Christ”*

**July 20, 2014**

**Sermon Text:** 2 Cor 2:1-11

**Scripture Reading:** Luke 15

### **Introduction-**

“The Donatist controversy is among the most serious and remarkable schisms in the history of Christianity. It concerned a single issue, not even a doctrinal one, but rather, one more

organizational than anything else. It resulted in two parallel Churches in northern Africa, a situation which endured for centuries.

In the last decade of the 3rd century CE, Emperor Diocletian ordered persecutions of various groups he blamed for a wave of plagues and pestilences which had swept the western Empire and resulted in economic and social instability. The chief target-groups ended up being (initially) Manicheans, and then Christians.

Diocletian's persecutions were not carried out evenly through the Empire. In some provinces, Roman rulers and forces didn't have the power or resources to carry them out. In others, particularly the large eastern cities, there were so many Christians that the authorities could not carry them out, aside perhaps from a few “examples.” Northern Africa, however, was home to the confluence of three factors: first, a strong Roman administrative and governing presence capable of

carrying out Diocletian's orders; second, a significant number of Manichaeans who were initially persecuted; and third, a significant number of Christians who became later targets. Such a combination of factors did not exist anywhere else in the Empire; hence, the controversy to come was unique to northern Africa.

During the persecutions, any Christian who renounced Christianity, made offerings to the Roman state gods and/or the Imperial divine cult, and who burned any sacred Christian texts they may have had, were spared. Those who refused — especially those caught with Christian texts that they refused to hand over or destroy — were usually killed. That texts were often used to determine who was Christian and who wasn't, meant that the clergy — those Christians most likely to have such things — were particularly vulnerable to the persecution.

While some Christian clergy resisted and were martyred, many did not. They renounced Christianity, allowed their books to be burned, and were spared. This was, of course, also true of many lay Christians, although a smaller percentage of them were affected because most had no sacred texts to give them away.

After Diocletian, the persecutions died down, and Christianity began to poke its head above ground once again (to use a cliché). In the first decade of the 4th century, churches were restored, clergy performed services again, and so on. Christians were, however, still cautious, afraid of invoking another persecution. Clergy were particularly cautious, due to their own vulnerability. When Diocletian's successor Constantine declared tolerance for Christianity in 313, all fear went away.

In the interim, between the end of Diocletian's persecution, and the Edict of Milan which made it safe to be openly Christian, the Church in northern Africa had to settle for whichever clergy were willing to "return to the fold." Some had never been caught by the Roman authorities, but others had renounced Christianity in order to stay alive. At first no one had much choice in the matter; too few clergy were willing to make themselves known again. But as it became ever safer to be Christian, the problem came to a head. Adding to it was the problem of Christians, particularly clergy, who wished to mollify the Imperial regime and thus try to accommodate it. Many who remembered the martyrs found it upsetting that fellow Christians would try to "make nice" with the enemy.

Many of these same north African Christians did not want to allow lapsed clergy (i.e. those who'd renounced their faith) to return. They considered it offensive to the memories of those who'd had the courage to become martyrs by not doing so. They might return to the Church as laymen — after an appropriate penance — but not as clergy ever again. Even prior to the Edict of Milan, this sentiment had been building; the open acceptance by Rome of Christianity merely caused the dam to break.

A cleric named Caecilian was elected Bishop of Carthage in 312, who was of the “pro-Roman” camp. This incensed many, and they refused to accept his appointment, on the legalistic grounds that he hadn't been properly ordained in the first place, some years prior. These “purists” elected, instead, their own bishop, Majorinus, one who denounced the “Roman collaborators” and refused to restore lapsed clergy. When he died in 315, the purists elected Donatus, also called Donatus Magnus. Due to his long tenure as the purist Bishop of Carthage (from 315 to 355 despite an exile in 347), Donatus ended up being the primary spokesman for the movement, and it bears his name.

Donatus and his faction declared the lapsed clergy ineligible to perform the sacraments, and that any which they may have performed, were invalid. The opposing party declared, again, that lapsed clergy could be restored to full authority — including the performance of sacraments — after having performed appropriate penance. They based this idea on the concept of forgiveness for all.

### Duelling Churches

Each side in the conflict denounced the other in the harshest terms. The two bishops coexisted, with each being succeeded by another bishop of the same faction. Over time, each side built its own churches, some next door to each other (which only made the situation even more heated). Across northern Africa, there were essentially two overlapping churches; one Donatist, the other traditionalist. For the most part these were doctrinally identical; their prime difference was the matter of lapsed clergy. A few decades into the controversy, though, some liturgical and ritual differences emerged. For example, the Donatists' services were strongly charismatic in nature (not dissimilar to those of the Montanists, although the elevation of women as “prophets” was not a hallmark of Donatism). Also, the sacrament of confession became an

individual one, private between priest and penitent, among the Catholics, but among Donatists it was a public rite, in which the penitent confessed his/her sins before the entire congregation.

This schism endured long after the point was moot (after all, once the generation after the Edict of Milan had died out, the problem of lapsed clergy no longer existed). With the passage of time, each side in the dispute became increasingly intransigent. Attempts to reconcile them, by a number of Popes as well as respected figures such as St Augustine, all failed.

Most of this time, the Donatists outnumbered the traditionalists, or Catholics. And they drifted apart in matters beyond just the fate of lapsed clergy. Donatist liturgies became increasingly charismatic in nature. They acquired a reputation, possibly deserved but probably not, for having strange and wild services.

The Donatists survived the Vandal invasion which began in 429 CE, and the reconquest of the eastern Emperor Justinian beginning in 533. Their fortunes appear to have dwindled after that, however, they maintained a presence in northern Africa nevertheless.

The Donatist controversy was never actually resolved. It remained a divisive point right up until the Muslim conquest of northern Africa in the 7th century, when Christianity in the region was wiped out. Of course, other (unaffected) parts of Christendom weighed in on the matter, and came down generally against the Donatists. Forgiveness had to be extended to everyone; although penance was required, and there was no guarantee that any penance would be easy.”

[<http://www.earlychristianhistory.info/donatus.html>]

When a member of the church, a professing Christian, sins grievously, bringing pain and anguish upon all the rest of the church and to the Lord, how are we to deal with them? In today’s visible church, often the answer seems to be “don’t do anything.” But that is not the instruction we have in Scripture. In addition, when we do obey the Lord and handle sin in the church through church discipline as outlined in Scripture, what do we do when the disciplined person repents (ie, is penitent)? *If we are not in unity about these matters, Satan is able to do what he did in the Donatist controversy.* He effects schism, he works to cause sin to go undisciplined, or to the other extreme he works to

overwhelm even a repentant person with hopelessness. We must get these situations right.

Here then is the Apostle Paul writing in his second letter to the church at Corinth:

2 Corinthians 2:1-11 For I made up my mind not to make another **painful** visit to you. (2) For if I cause you **pain**, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have **pained**? (3) And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer **pain** from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. (4) For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you **pain** but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

(5) Now if anyone has caused **pain**, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure--not to put it too severely--to all of you. (6) For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, (7) so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. (8) So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. (9) For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in

everything. (10) Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, (11) so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

Families have troubles. If any of you have a “problem” family member, you know this. Christian families experience it sometimes as well – one of the children rebels, runs with the wrong crowd, gets into drugs...you know the sad story. Sin in a family causes pain and anguish.

Proverbs 19:26 He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach.

And so it is in the church family when a member persists in sin. It is painful to the entire church. Did you notice how many times the Apostle Paul used the word “pain” in 2:1-11? Something very painful had occurred in the church at Corinth. Paul had written to them about it, and it was very grievous to him to have to do so. Someone at Corinth had “pained” Paul and the entire church. The matter had to be dealt with. What was it?

While we do not know with certainty that the sin described by Paul in 1 Cor 5 was one and the same as that to which he is referring here in 2 Cor 2, it is very probable that he was. You see that the matter concerns:

- Someone who had caused pain to Paul and the church
- Someone who had been punished by the “majority” (ie, the rest of the church)
- Someone whose sin and situation were initially NOT being dealt with properly by the church, so much so that Paul had written to the church in anguish and tears,
- Someone whose situation/sin required *obedience* by the church to Paul’s instruction regarding him.
- Someone who needed to be forgiven now and comforted.

We are going to proceed then with the assumption that the person in question here in 2 Cor 2 is one and the same as the man guilty of scandalous sin in 1 Cor 5. Listen to the nature of his sin once more:

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. (2) And you are

arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

Rank, open, arrogant, unrepentant sexual immorality coming and sitting in the pew every Lord’s Day, taking part in the Lord’s Table and so on. And rather than being pained and grieving over this blasphemous behavior in their midst, the Corinthians were arrogant about it. They probably boasted about their freedom and liberty – you can see that attitude identified by Paul in other parts of 1 Corinthians. This is the professing local church today in so many cases. The rankest of sins are tolerated and in a boastful manner – “see how loving and kind and liberated we are” in Christ. That kind of thing.

Paul will not have it. The matter is grievous and severe and the Lord demand’s immediate action:

1 Corinthians 5:3-7 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. (4) When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, (5) you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his

spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (6) Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? (7) Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

And he closes the chapter with this instruction:

1 Corinthians 5:11-13 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. (12) For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (13) God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

It is apparent that the Corinthians did obey Paul's "painful letter" –

2 Corinthians 7:5-12 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn--fighting without and fear within. (6) But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, (7) 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. (8) 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. (9) As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. (10) For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. (11) For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. (12) So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.

Notice that the sin in the church then was a test of the entire church. Would they obey the Lord, or would they continue unrepentant in their arrogance. There is nothing

“righteous” about tolerating ongoing, unrepentant, blasphemous sin in the church. Paul is rejoicing here that the Corinthians repented and obeyed. They had come to a “godly grief” after reading Paul’s painful letter.

Now then, having obeyed Paul, having put the wicked man out of the church, having inflicted this punishment upon him, having “handed him over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh” so that he might repent and his soul be saved on that Day, what were they to do when this man came to real repentance, as it appeared he had? Is ex-communication final? Is the church to prescribe some kind of “penance” for 3 or 5 or 7 or.... years? We have the answers here. Listen to Paul once more –

(5) Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure--not to put it too severely--to all of you. (6) For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, (7) so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. (8) So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. (9) For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. (10) Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed,

what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, (11) so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

NOTE: It is important that we take careful note that in the discipline of this man at Corinth, Paul called upon the *entire* membership of that church to put him out –

1 Cor 5:4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, (5) you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

And here, once more, he is telling them all to forgive him and reaffirm their love for him. That is to say, it is vital to understand that EVERY member of the church, the entire church, is to stand together in these cases. For the sake of the name of Christ, for the sake and protection of the rest of the church, and for the ultimate good and salvation of the sinning brother. This requires faith. It requires regenerate hearts motivated by the supernatural faith in God’s Word that God gives His people. Paul said this all was a test for the church at

Corinth. And it remains a test for us today when we are faced with such situations. And so I ask each one of us-

*Do you believe these things? Do you believe:*

- That there is a Day coming when we all appear before the Lord?
- That everyone who has walked in unrepentant sin in this life will perish on that Day?
- That Christ expects us, His people, to obey His commandments, including those commandments to put ongoing, unrepentant sin out from among us?
- That the process of church discipline outlined by Christ in His Word works to protect the rest of the church? That sin, like leaven, spreads and corrupts others if left unchecked?
- That the process of church discipline is a supernatural and powerful means by which the Lord brings straying sheep back into His fold?

There can be no bystanders in the church in this process. Paul did not tell some, or just the church officers in Corinth to deal with this sinning man. He told *the church*, and He tells you and me – every single one of us – that

this is our responsibility. And he tells us that each one of these situations is a *test from Him to see if we will obey Him or not.*

2Cor 2:9 For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.

No one can be a mere spectator, you see. When we obey the Lord and put out an unrepentant member, we all do it.

Now, *what happens when church discipline results in the sinning member coming to repentance?* Even if there has been a grievous sin like the one this man at Corinth had been openly walking in? Once more the entire church is to be involved-

(6) For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, (7) so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. (8) So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

This is not done naively. We know the prevalence of false repentance and its dangers. Nor does this mean that in every case the person must be re-admitted to the fellowship of a particular local church. The nature of

the sin comes into play in such a decision. He may be forgiven, yet wisdom and kindness toward the victim of his offense sometimes dictates he attend a different local church. A truly repentant person will accept that gladly.

### The Devices of Satan in All of This

Satan is a murderer. He is a destroyer. He wants to destroy men's souls. It is important for us to note that in this particular sin and discipline at Corinth, Paul mentions Satan both at the beginning and the end of the process. See it –

1 Corinthians 5:4-5 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, (5) you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

There is the start. The man wants to live as a citizen of Satan's realm, so the church is to put him out of God's visible kingdom, the local church, and hand him over to the dominion of darkness. It is to let him experience "life" in that kingdom. Satan, it appears, is then given permission to afflict such a person in the sense of "the destruction of the flesh."

I think it is absolutely vital that we all come to terms with whether we believe this or not. We have recently had to exercise this discipline. Do you see this as a mere human process akin to suspending one's membership in some club? Or do we believe it to be what God's Word says it is – the handing over of a person to Satan so that they might come to repentance and not perish in hell? I am astonished at how this test reveals the absence of genuine faith in so many professing Christians and church leaders. Astonished. One of the most powerful means of leading a person to repentance is not used because vast numbers of people who claim to be Christians do not believe God's Word. Do you?

Now then, listen to the more joyful side of all of this and notice once more that Paul mentions Satan –

2 Corinthians 2:5-11 Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure--not to put it too severely--to all of you. (6) For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, (7) so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. (8) So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. (9) For this is why I wrote, that I might

test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. (10) Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, (11) so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

As we mentioned already, Satan is a destroyer. A murderer. He will work his destruction on the UN-repentant person and then turn right around and work it any way he can on the REPENTANT person! In the latter case, he will work (as perhaps he did in the Donatist Controversy) to make us, the church, too harsh. Too final, thus overwhelming the repentant sinner with hopelessness – excessive sorrow – so that they conclude not even Christ will ever forgive them. We must not do this or we will play right into Satan's design.

Matthew 18:17-20 If he 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. (18) Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (19) Again I say to you, if two of

you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. (20) For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Bind (discipline) OR loose (forgiveness and restoration). Christ promises to be in the midst of this process.

Therefore, should any person under the discipline of this church come to their senses, as the prodigal in the pig pen did, repent and return, they most assuredly will find forgiveness and restoration not only in this local church, but from Christ Himself. Try to imagine how important that truth would be to YOU, if you were the prodigal!

We must NOT be like the older brother of the prodigal (who represented the Pharisees who grumbled at Jesus-

Luke 15:1-2 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. (2) And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

