



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

“The Great Offender”

TRANSCRIPT

We are turning today to 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 5 through verse 11 for our Scripture reading. Those of you who are somewhat familiar with 2 Corinthians will know that this is one of the passages of the New Testament that has to do primarily with an instance of church discipline. We were hearing Mr. Pryor just a moment ago say that what we are attempting to do is to teach through the book of 2 Corinthians. And I imagine that if we were just picking passages to expound, as is probably the custom in most of our churches today, that very few would ever choose this portion for exposition in a Sunday morning message. As we've said more than once, that's one of the advantages of following the particular method that we are following. That is, it forces us to give consideration to passages that we would normally, or usually, pass by, and this is one of them.

I confess as an expositor of the word -- and that means that I don't do it with authority you understand, but as one who attempts to do that -- that I never look forward with great anticipation to some of these passages. Perhaps that's something wrong with me because there are many things that are wrong with me, but some passages are more appealing than others, and this is just not one of the passages that has the appeal of others. For example, next week the passage has a great appeal to me as Paul begins his

discussion of Christian ministry. And, in fact, most of the text from now on through the 5th chapter is remarkable and the kind of passage that I would want to preach on almost any time. But, nevertheless, we must pay attention to these sections and sometimes the things that we avoid are really the things that we need. So we probably need this. And I would imagine that in Believer’s Chapel that the elders and the deacons and the members and the friends who are here today will discover something here that is important for us and really applicable to us.

So let’s turn now and read together verse 5 through verse 11. I read, you follow along in your text. I’m reading from the New American Standard Bible, which will generally be the text for this series of messages through 2 Corinthians.

Now, perhaps I should say one other thing. Remember that the apostle has evangelized the Corinthians and the church was formed. Then difficulties arose within the church, questions. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to answer some of those questions and to deal with some of the problems that were there. You might expect problems in a new church, a young church. Evidently, further problems arose and specifically questions about Paul’s apostolic authority. Some felt that he should not be given the authority that the original apostles possessed, that he didn’t have it. And, in fact, it appears that one particular individual was the ringleader in opposition to the apostle. Paul made a trip to Corinth of which we have no record specifically. We know that he made it because he mentions in the 12th and 13th chapters of this epistle that his next visit would be his third visit there. So he must have then made a visit. We assume it was because of difficulties in the church. We also know that still the difficulties persisted, and Paul wrote a very severe letter. We’ve talked about that. We’ve called it a stinging letter or a severe letter. And Titus, evidently, took the letter to Corinth.

Paul became a little disturbed afterwards because it was such a sharp letter. He wondered if it was perhaps too strong. He was concerned. He waited for Titus to hear the news at Troas. Did not find him. Found it necessary to move on the Macedonia

where he met him and Titus gave him the good news that the Corinthians had responded to the apostle’s ministry and had actually, as we learned, disciplined an individual who was the ringleader in the problem there. So that’s the background of these verses now that we read. Verse 5,

“But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree -- in order not to say too much -- to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such an one overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. For to this end also I wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

Those last words, incidentally, are word play in the original text. The word for “schemes” and the word for “ignorant” come from the same root. And so Paul, in a sense, is saying something like -- it’s almost impossible to do it in English at least I’ve never seen anyone do it well. We are not without knowledge of his knowing strategies, something like that. But at any rate, the apostle plays on the words in order to make the point and emphasize it that Satan’s schemes are things with which he is acquainted.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let’s bow together now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are grateful to Thee for this portion of Thy word. We recognize, Lord, so often the passages, the statements, the sentences, even the

phrases that sometimes are not pleasant to us, are not pleasant to us because they are the things that we need. And we recognize our nature is a rebellious nature, fundamentally.

We thank Thee and praise Thee that by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ we have been brought to the knowledge of him, and a transformation is taking place in our life that will ultimately be consummated at the coming of the Lord.

But in the meantime, we also recognize that the sin principle dwells within our members. And we do not like often to do the things that we must do according to Holy Scripture. We thank Thee for the discipline that the Corinthian church exercised. And, Lord, we thank thee for these words of instruction concerning discipline, its necessity, as well as its perils. We pray that our time around the word may be profitable for us as an assembly and as individuals. We thank Thee for this lovely day in which we are able to meet, open the Scriptures, read Thy word, and ponder it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

May each of us, as a result of our time together, leave this place walking closer, more closely in fellowship with Thee. We give Thee thanks for the gospel and for the way that it, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, has transformed lives. Lord, we pray that today wherever the word of God goes forth there may be fruit that the church of Jesus Christ may be enlarged if it please Thee, and also that the church of Christ may be edified and strengthened and built up.

We pray not only for our assembly but for the whole body. May Thy blessing be upon it for the glory of Christ? And we pray for our country. We pray for those who are troubled and have many serious problems in their lives, for those who are mentioned in our calendar of concern, especially do we pray. We pray for them. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt respond to their petitions, give aid and comfort and consolation and healing within the purposes of our Triune God. We thank Thee now for this time together as we sing, as we reflect on the word. May we have the sense that Thou art building us up in

our faith. For those who may be here without Christ, may this be the day in which they turn to him.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is a topic that is related specifically to the individual concerning whom Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians chapter 2. The title “The Great Offender” is a common title that has been attached to this individual whose name fortunately we do not know. When one thinks of biblical discipline, the question often arises; does the Bible really have much to say about it? Well, I think if you went through the New Testament, just the New Testament, and you took out the chapters of the New Testament, wrote down the numbers and the designations of those chapters in which discipline is set out, I think you would be startled. I’ve done that. I think I was startled to discover how many chapters of the New Testament are related specifically to biblical discipline. Much of it goes back to our Lord’s statements in Matthew chapter 18 in which he sets forth certain principles of church discipline when he was here in the days of his flesh. But then the rest of the New Testament is literally filled with references to Biblical discipline. Evidently, the apostles thought it was extremely important.

In 1 Corinthians, we have more than one chapter devoted to discipline. We have this section in 2 Corinthians. We have passages in the second letter that Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, the 3rd chapter, Galatians chapter 5, and one could go on. I have a list of about 20 chapters, so it’s not necessary for us to deal with them. This, according to the amount of the New Testament devoted to it, is an important subject.

When we think of the benefits of discipline, of course, the benefits are obvious if one looks at the biblical revelation and picks out the benefits of biblical discipline. No argument exists whatsoever that discipline is a useful activity. One sees it illustrated in our own personal lives, our personal family lives, for example. The family, for example, that doesn’t discipline its children will learn that that was a serious mistake. Discipline in

the family is an expression of the love of parents for children, the kind of love that the children will ultimately be thankful to God for. If we do not discipline our children and discipline them as Paul disciplines or as Paul comments upon the discipline exercised by the Corinthians that is with compassion, we shall see serious and unfortunate things in our own families.

And I know from the standpoint of a person now, as an old man, looking back and seeing the benefits of discipline, not simply in my life, but in my children’s lives, I can reflect upon the fact that the unhappy and often unpleasant things that are necessary in discipline are things that cause me to give thanksgiving to God today.

The benefits of church discipline are of a similar character. There is, of course, a danger in discipline and Paul speaks of it in two places in this brief section. He says, for example, that a person might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow, a person who has been disciplined. Furthermore, he says that it’s possible for Satan to take advantage of biblical discipline. So there are perils in the matter of discipline. But the necessity, the benefits, and the perils are all part of the biblical revelation, and they are found here.

The reformers who spent a great deal of time discussing the nature of the church, because they were responsible for a new kind of church, they pointed out that discipline was one of the necessary marks of a church. In other words, a Christian church that doesn’t exercise discipline is one that doesn’t have one of the marks of the church. So discipline is one of the features that characterize a Christian church. We often say in defining the church, a church is a group of individuals who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and who meet regularly in one place for the ministry of the word, for the observance of the ordinances under the discipline of elders or church officials. We have differences of opinion over the precise term that we use for individuals who have oversight. The New Testament uses the term elder, so under elders. That’s an important and necessary feature of a church. If we do not observe the ordinances, we can hardly

be called a Christian church. If we do not exercise discipline, we cannot be called a Christian church.

I was amazed this past week speaking with a young man and hearing him tell me that someone in the city had criticized the Chapel as being a church that didn’t exercise discipline. I don’t know maybe he had done some things that needed discipline, and we didn’t find out about it. But I don’t know the reason for the statement, but perhaps it was simply because we don’t have a written list of members. But we’ve always taken the position that anyone who attends the Chapel regularly is one of our members and therefore subject to the discipline of our elders. And though I am not now an elder, I can speak for them, I think and say that they do exercise discipline. There is hardly a meeting of the elders in which the subject of discipline does not arise, and discipline is actively carried out. I think in the spirit of the Apostle Paul. That is, in most cases it’s not necessary for the discipline to reach the stage of public marking of the individual. As Paul says, most of the people respond to the discipline or else they leave the Chapel. That’s unfortunate. That’s characteristic of Evangelicalism today. It’s a very unfortunate thing. In my opinion, that’s one of the saddest things about Evangelicalism. And having been in several other churches and knowing that that is a response that many people give to it, it’s very discouraging that a church -- I’m not speaking of ourselves but of an Evangelical church -- but a church should honestly before God and earnestly and spiritually try to consider a case of discipline, try to carry out discipline, and then find the kind of response, no response of a positive nature but simply a person leaves this assembly and goes to another assembly taking the problems with them without resolution. That’s very sad. Unfortunately, it is true. And we feel -- I think I speak for the elders here -- we feel that if we know of cases like that, then it is our responsibility to speak to the other Evangelical churches and let them know the situation so far as we understand it. We hope that they will do that with us, and occasionally that is true. I’ve had a call from a local Baptist church’s minister within the last two or three years which a matter that

apparently needed discipline was suggested to me by this man. I was grateful for that because it was something of which we were not aware. I reported it to the elders, and they took steps in connection with it. That is, I say, one of the sad things characteristic of our churches today. It’s true of denominational churches. It’s true of independent churches.

So the idea that peace at any price is a good thing is something that is hardly justifiable spiritually ever. Even in politics, that’s no good. So the idea of peace at any price in the church is a tremendous mistake made by many of us. We should never forget that and realize that if there is need for church discipline, the result is their works, the leaven of sin in our congregation and the tendency of sin, a tendency of leaven and sin is to spread and affect others as well.

Warren Wiersbe is a friend of mine, for many years a pastor of a large church in Covington, Kentucky, and now a radio preacher. He has a little stanza he likes to quote, “To live above with saints we love will certainly be glory. To live below with saints we know well that’s another story.” [Laughter] Well, those are facts, and that’s part of the reason why discipline is necessary in a local church because we do have problems getting along with one another from time to time. And if we remember that we all have the sin principle dwelling within us, we are capable of the sins that are set forth so plainly and so often in the pages of the New Testament.

One notices the compassion of the Apostle Paul here, and that’s a necessity in discipline. In the zeal of exercising discipline, we should never forget that it should be done with compassion. Fathers and mothers who discipline their children are never successful in discipline if they do not discipline with compassion, with love and affection, and the communication of that even in the correction. When Paul disciplines, one sees the compassion of the apostle in the things that he writes and says and does. And the local churches that he advised and admonished and taught were churches that were taught to exercise discipline with compassion. After all, the aim of discipline is not simply

penalty -- in fact, it’s not penal essentially, it’s remedial. It’s designed to correct and restore and cause the individual to grow. One can certainly see that in Paul’s case here.

We’ve talked about the occasion; I won’t go into it further except to say that it is possible that the apostle was challenged in Corinth. But this is part of his response. The Corinthian church finally exercised discipline with respect to the offender, and now the apostle having heard of that from Titus writes with reference to it.

By the way, there is a text in Proverbs I think that has some very necessary application to what we are talking about for the writer of the Proverb says in chapter 27 in verse 6, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” There is a difference between hurting someone and harming someone, and it’s important, if necessary, to hurt in order to avoid harming someone. So occasionally discipline must be exercised and each of us must learn to cope with it and to submit to it.

Now, Paul in verse 5 speaks through verse 7, incidentally of the adequacy of the discipline of the offender as he understands it to have taken place from Titus. “But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree in order not to say too much, to all of you.”

Now, will you notice, first of all, how the apostle’s compassion appears in the fact that he is speaking very delicately and indefinitely about the situation in Corinth. He doesn’t really tell the name of the individual. He doesn’t say it was Joe Brown or something like that, but he speaks of this individual as “any such a one,” which incidentally has caused some people to think this individual is the same one spoken of in the 5th chapter of 1 Corinthians, probably not, although there are reasons that might support that. I’m taking this as a different individual.

He says, “But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me.” In other words, they know who the individual is in Corinth, and Paul knows, but we don’t know. Now, I think that’s good. I think -- you see, it’s not necessary for us to know that individual when we get to heaven maybe we will meet this individual and he’ll come up

and say, “By the way, I was the fellow Paul was speaking about there in 2 Corinthians chapter 2.” But we don’t need to know that now. And so Paul refers to him somewhat indefinitely --of course they know who he is, but he doesn’t want to rub it in, so he speaks of him as such a one or if anyone has harmed me. I think that’s an evidence of the concern and the compassionate concern that the apostle had, and I think that anyone who exercises discipline should exercise discipline with this kind of compassionate concern.

So the first thing that we should do when we see anyone step out clearly from the teaching of the word of God and we feel a word of exhortation on a personal level is necessary, we need to do our counseling or our criticism, as the Germans used to like to say “under four eyes.” That is, under the eyes of the two individuals involved. So the apostle exercises compassion here, it seems to me, at least it appears in what he’s saying.

He says also that when a person has sinned in the local church, he doesn’t harm just himself or some friend of his who may be involved, but actually the whole church is involved. Notice he says, “If any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me but in some degree to all of you.” We are a body. The church as a whole is a body. The sin of one member does affect us all. In the Old Testament, that was clear in many cases. In Israel’s experience, the sin of one Israelite, God pointed out was often the sin of the nation. Akan is a shining example of that. And so in the local church when I sin, the body is affected.

Now, in Corinth the majority acted. That raises an interesting question. What about the minority? Well, the minority -- now we are speculating, the minority -- remember in Corinth there were individuals, Paul pointed out, who said I am of Paul, others said I am of Apollos, some said I am of Cephas or Peter, and some, perhaps a holier-than-thou group said I am not of any human individual, I am of Christ. So it has been suggested that perhaps the minority here were the anti-Paulinists, and they wanted the discipline to be less than was exercised because the men really had a lot of positive

things that could be said about his viewpoint because there was some question about Paul’s apostleship, they might have said. On the other hand, it seems more likely, to students of 2 Corinthians, that the minority were probably those who wanted a severer discipline to be exercised on this individual. So Paul says sufficient. He’s passing on his opinion. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority. In other words, the apostle says the church as a whole has acted properly and the degree of the discipline, he feels, is satisfactory. You’ll notice, by the way, that he goes on to say in verse 7, “So the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him lest somehow such an one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” Now, that would tend to me to say that the minority were those who wanted to exercise a severer discipline, but Paul says I don’t think that that would be wise.

Now, another thing I’d like for you to notice here because it bears on such things as the nature of the church and ministry. He says in verse 7, “So that on the contrary you should rather forgive.” Now, he doesn’t say you must -- as a matter of fact in the Greek text even the term should maybe a little too strong. What Paul is saying here is not I am an apostle, I’m telling you what you ought to do and you’d better follow what I am telling you you must do. In fact, it’s very clear that the apostle is leaving this ultimate decision to the local church. In other words, no necessity is set out. He’s just saying this is my opinion. You should rather forgive and comfort him. And of course the reason for it is that he might not despair. Because when an individual is disciplined, the tendency is, in many cases, to despair or perhaps, in some cases, if there is still some rebellion, apostasy, I won’t have anything to do with this church anymore.

In our society, as I mentioned earlier, we will say we’ll go to another church, and the problem is taken with them. Or perhaps, well, I cannot please them, and I apparently cannot please the Lord, I think I’ll just live in reckless indulgence. There are people who take that view as well. Or even possibly, I think I’ll just take my life. Now, those are serious matters. And the apostle, it seems to me, alludes to that when he says “Lest such

an one be swallowed up by excessive sorrow.” The apostle was not happy with that. But that principle pertains even in political life as we’ve see just recently when one of our national security leaders has apparently, according to the newspapers committed suicide because of despair over his own political situation. Well, that same general principle applies in church life as well.

The early church was much stricter than the Apostle Paul, it seems to me. The early church, when discipline took place, they tended to act very strongly. For example, John Calvin criticizes him, a lot of people might be surprised at that because they think he was about as severe as you possibly could be. But Calvin says, “In my view the bishops of the early church lacked wisdom in this matter and no excuse can be found for them. They decreed canons demanding a period of penance lasting three years or seven years or sometimes even for life. And by these they excluded poor, unhappy men from the fellowship of the church. So even after the sin was known and after the church acted, it was three years or seven years before they could be restored to fellowship and they were required to do penance.” So the apostle obviously did not take that view. For Paul, it was enough that the sinner should repent of the action that brought on the discipline and that he could be reconciled to the church on the basis of his genuine repentance from his sin. That, it seems to me, is biblical.

Now, in the 8th verse the apostle gives his counsel in a positive way. He says, “Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. That word “urge” is the word that has been translated “comfort” up to this point. Here it means I exhort you, I encourage you probably, “wherefore I encourage you to reaffirm your love for him.” It’s the very same word found in the immediately preceding verse and translate properly “comfort.” You know, sometimes -- I may just insert this -- sometimes people who study hermeneutics tell us that if a word is used in one sense in one verse and it’s used again in the next verse it always has the same sense. That’s a lot of hermeneutical bologna, if you’ll pardon the expression. A long time ago I doubted that rule and so I through over a

number of years picked our places where words found in the same context had different meanings, and I have a long list of them. And also words even in the same verse that have different meanings. That’s a general rule. I agree with it as a general rule, but there are always exceptions. And here we have an illustration, the word *parakaleo* meaning comfort in verse 7, but here obviously not comfort, it means to encourage or exhort. Encourage I think is proper here. So Paul encourages them that they affirm their love for the individual who has sinned. Notice he doesn’t invoke any apostolic authority. Again, it’s the authority of the local church. The church is to handle it, and in the church it is the elders who are to handle it. For the elders are those into whose hands has been committed oversight. So it’s important for us in Believer’s Chapel to remember that. Take heed to the church of God over which -- or actually within which the Holy Ghost has appointed you overseers. The apostle said to the elders of the church at Ephesus. They are men who are over us in the Lord. They are fathers and we are children and when we step out of line and they say look you’ve stepped out of line. They cannot take out the paddle, but we are to respond to them as those who are over us in the Lord. And many of us, when our fathers used to discipline us and we would say, under our breath to ourselves, when I get old I’m not going to do that. But we nevertheless did what our fathers told us to do. Well, that’s what we ought to do in the church, too. We believe that God has appointed them as our overseers, and so we are to submit to their oversight. They are not perfect. They make mistakes every now and then, but we probably make a great deal more. And our responsibility is to be submissive, and so we are submissive. And in so doing, there is happiness and joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. And sooner or later, if your viewpoint is correct, it will come out and you can hope the elders will say, you know you were right about that, we need to change.

So Paul doesn’t, I say, invoke apostolic authority, leaves it in the hands of the church. That has important bearing on ministry because the tendency in ecclesiastical circles is to give authority to ministry, but there is none of that in the New Testament, so

far as I can tell. Now the greatest extreme is in the Roman Catholic Church. H.C. Lea who wrote a book on the “History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences,” said that he had looked at one of the Roman Catholic versions of the New Testament -- he doesn’t mention which one -- and the text had a note at this point. And it said the apostle here granted an indulgence or a pardon in the person and by the authority of Christ to the incestuous Corinthian whom he put under penance which pardon consisted in a releasing of part of the temporal of punishment due to sin. And that’s the note at this point in the text.

Now, do you find anything about penance here? Do you find anything in the text here about granting an indulgence? There is nothing here at all on that point. That’s something that has been inserted by the man who wrote a note to the text. It’s like individuals, and there are some of them, who read a Scofield Bible and look at a note at the bottom of the page and regard that as written by the apostle, too. Sometimes that’s true, but I know very few people who are that ignorant. But there have been some exceptions, no doubt. That reminds me of Irving Kristol’s famous statement which I quote again, “When we lack the will to see things as they really are, there is nothing so mysterious as the obvious.” And since the apostle committed discipline to the church and not to a body of ecclesiastical rulers -- well, if you hold that if it should be committed to a body of ecclesiastical rulers who stand over churches in the form of bishops and ultimately even in some of our Protestant groups of the general assembly, you’d like to find some support for this, but you cannot find it in the New Testament, so far as I can tell.

In fact, the statement that Jesus made in John 20, verse 23 where he gives them, apparently in the minds of some people, authority with respect to sins -- this is the text that I’m speaking about, verse 23, “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.” I haven’t had time to talk about the meaning of that text, but that text was a text that was spoken by the

Lord Jesus to a group of apostles that did not include all of them and, furthermore, if the Lukan passage is a parallel and it seems to be, there were others beside the apostle present. So when Jesus uttered that statement he was not giving authority for discipline to apostles who in turn would give it to bishops and to a church organization. There is nothing of that in the New Testament, so far as I can tell.

But if you want to disagree with me, you are free to do that. I suggest that you read the Bible. And if you find some justification for something else, come let me know. I’d like to hear what you have to say about it. I’m not challenging you. I’m just saying I’d like to know because, as far as I can tell, in the New Testament discipline is committed to the local churches and specifically to those who have the oversight in the local churches. That’s why it’s so important that we have elders who are spiritual men and qualified to lead and guide and have the oversight of us.

Now, Paul explains his counsel in verse 9 through 11 he says, “For to this end,” I wrote -- that’s the letter, the severe letter, evidently, “I wrote that I might put you to the test whether you are obedient in all things.” In other words, Paul says I wrote that letter to see how you’d respond. I wanted to see if you’d really respond to the evil in the congregation by exercising discipline. That’s one of the reasons that the apostle wrote it. So faithful are the wounds of a friend. Paul was being faithful.

But he also had concern for the Corinthians. He said, “For whom you forgive anything I forgive also for indeed what I have forgiven, if I’ve forgiven anything I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ.” Their good and God’s presence are the things that were significant for Paul. In other words, their good under his eye was Paul’s goal.

And finally in verse 11, he speaks of what may be called the covetousness of Satan. I say that because the word that is translated here “to take an advantage of” is a word that means essentially, in its root derivation, “to have more.” It ultimately comes to mean something like “to grasp.” And it’s the root from which we get the word

“covetousness.” So it’s striking, isn’t it, that he should say, “In order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

Now, we can expect that Satan to take men by sin -- in other words, when men sin then that’s proper for Satan to take hold of them. That’s what he does. That’s within his sphere of authority given by God, ultimately. And, in fact, the apostle in the first letter says remember with regard to the offender there he had committed him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. So it’s proper for Satan to take men by sin, but that he should do so through man’s repentance. That seems so strange.

In fact, the early church fathers spoke about this. They said why when men repent that’s our weapon. That’s not his weapon. But it’s possible even for a scheming personal, evil, angelic being as Satan to take advantage of something that is good by the overstressing of it or the failure to handle the situation properly. This word I think explains the “for your sakes” of the preceding verse. I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ. In other words, it was to their advantage and to his advantage that Satan be thwarted. He was going to give Satan no beachhead in the church in Corinth. I wish we had time to talk about the names of Satan in this book, but we’ll come to them. There are three or four of them that are very significant including the word “serpent.” So that Satan should take advantage of man’s repentance shows you how wily the wicked one really is. That he could do so -- because an individual is swallowed up by grief take advantage of his repentance shows you that we are dealing with a very wise individual in Satan. And incidentally, you can see clearly that Satan for the Apostle Paul is not an influence but a person with whom we have to deal.

Now, let me conclude by saying I want you to notice just for a moment the evidence of the apostle’s compassion. He put the saints first. That’s the tenor of the first four verses. He didn’t take the insult against him so personally that he couldn’t do anything but lash back as many of us would do. As a matter of fact, he sent a stern letter

for their good. As I say, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” He sought their growth. He actually sent the letter that he sent in order to see how they would respond so that they would meet the challenge, make the right decisions, and thus grow. In other words, he wasn’t concerned with vengeance, he wanted correction. He wasn’t concerned with punishment; he was looking forward to the transformation of the believers in Corinth. And then, of course, he forgave. Forgiveness is medicine for a broken heart. And one of the things that marks Paul out as a man a cut above us is the majesty of the apostle when in difficulty. Look, he pleads for his enemy. He pleads for the man who caused the trouble by insulting him, by denying him his God-given authority, by criticizing him so that he caused murmuring, complaining, discord, and strife in the church at Corinth. But it’s Paul who stands up and says we want to prevent him being overwhelmed, swallowed up by sorrow and allow Satan to take him repentance which is admirable and make it a reason for failure. I think, in these little insights into Paul, we get some idea of the majesty of this spiritual man.

And one final point, the discipline worked. If not overdone, discipline always works. I know that there are instances in which it doesn’t work because people are hard, and we should avoid that. Mary Lamb, so William Barclay says, had terrible periods of insanity and perhaps part of the reason was that she was never treated very well by her mother. She used to sigh, why is it that I never seem to be able to do anything to please my mother? Any of you children ever felt like that? Almost all of us who have been disciplined have felt like that at times. It’s usually an excuse, but we have felt like that. Luther even could scarcely bare to pray the Lord’s Prayer. That’s striking, isn’t it? But he said the reason that he could scarcely pray the Lord’s Prayer was because his own father was so stern that to begin a prayer with “Our Father,” painted a picture of grim terror to him.

Now, you might expect that a man like that would say let’s don’t discipline like the Bible says. But, no, Luther didn’t do that he didn’t make that mistake. He said spare

the rod and spoil the child. Yes, but beside the rod, keep an apple to give the child when he’s done well. Well, that’s the way in which discipline should be exercised with compassion, and, that, the apostle has seen done in Corinth, and he approves it.

So the “Great Offender,” we don’t know his name. When we get to heaven we can even give thanks for his experience because it teaches us a lot about the ways of God. .

If you are here today and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you don’t have any discipline that is spiritual because you are not within the body of Christ yet. You do not know him whom to know his life eternal. You do not have spiritual elders who have been born again by God the Holy Spirit and who seek for the goodness of your own soul, but you may receive the forgiveness of sins through faith in the Lord Jesus who died for sinners.

And if you are here today and you wonder if you are among the elect, you can settle that question, too, because if you, within your heart, look to the Lord and say, I thank thee Lord for Jesus Christ who died for sinners, I’m surely a sinner, and you’ve offered forgiveness of sins and justification to those who believe in him, I believe your word. I’m trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and not in my good works, not in the things that I’ve done, not in my church, not in sitting at the Lord’s Table or being baptized or my culture, education, anything like that. I’m resting upon what Christ has done alone receiving eternal life you also receive the assurance that you are one of God’s elect. Come to Christ. Believe in Him. If you are sitting there and saying, Well, I don’t want to do that, well then, according to Scripture, you are getting exactly what you want and you have no complaints at all. Come to Christ. Believe in Him. Trust in Him and receive forgiveness of sins and come under the disciplinary provisions of the family of God. They are marvelous. They are great. They are encouraging and extremely comforting. Believe in Him and Thou shall be saved. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these passages in the word of God that speak to the needs that we often have. We thank Thee for the experiences of the early church and for what they mean to us today nineteen hundred years later. We thank Thee, in one sense, for the “Great Offender.” We thank Thee for the change of heart Thou didst give and for the lessons that have come to us.

Lord, if there should be any in this audience who have not yet believed in Him, whom to believe in is to possess eternal life, may at this very moment they turn to Thee to be saved.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.