

Authentic Restoration

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[0 : 00] There was once a rich man, a rich and wealthy man, who saw a bruised and injured woman in the gutter. She was dirty and wounded. He lifted her up, he cleaned her and he cared for her.

One day, they were married, with a solemn oath and a giving of promises. He gave her fine clothes and jewellery, the very best bracelets and necklaces and rings of gold and silver.

They honeymooned and feasted together. The man cared for her and in his spotlight, she became beautiful. And her fame and popularity spread.

All knew about this woman's beauty. But she trusted in her beauty. And she used her fame to sell herself. She sold herself to anyone that she could.

She even sold all her gifts that her husband had given her, so she could pay for lovers to be with her. Instead of receiving payment, she paid for them herself.

[1 : 16] But the money disappeared. Her beauty gone and her lovers turned on her. She was left bruised and dirty and ruined in the gutter again.

But again, her husband came to her and lifted her up. He wiped away her tears. He wiped away her blood at the cost of his own.

He restored her beauty because of his great love for her. The man in this story is God. And the woman is his people Israel.

This is a summary of part of the Old Testament from Ezekiel chapter 16. Let me encourage you to go home and read that. Ezekiel 16 tells that story in far greater detail.

But it tells of God's people like a wife doing the worst possible thing in a marriage. Absolute betrayal.

[2 : 20] Because the Bible, in one sense, is a love story. A story of people that God has chosen to love who run from him and have chosen other things and other gods to love.

It shows in black and white how depraved we are as people compared to God's love. That's the picture the Bible presents of God and of us.

God chooses people and made them wonderful and they ran in every direction. But God, at the cost of his own son, has lifted us up and restored us.

As we come to the final passage in 2 Corinthians, we're looking at authentic restoration. Paul has had conflict with this church in Corinth because they had run away from Jesus.

They had broken relationship with him. They've chased a different version of Jesus because they were deceived by a group of so-called super apostles. As Paul closes this letter, he reminds the church of the consequences of sin.

[3 : 31] But he points them to a beautiful picture of what being restored with God looks like. When they're restored in relationship with Paul, with each other, and with God.

And he calls them to the end of this love story of when the couple is restored. It's that happily ever after moment that he's calling them to. Because this is the longing of our soul.

To be restored. To be in complete and perfect relationship with other people and with God. And so as we finish 2 Corinthians today, we're going to see how we can have our relationship with God restored.

And our relationship with others restored. So please, have your Bibles open. 2 Corinthians chapter 12. And we'll be going through to the end of chapter 13.

So Paul outlines the conflict between him and the church and Corinth. It's effectively, like most conflict, it's all because of unmet expectations. Verse 20.

[4 : 36] For I am afraid that when I come, I might not find you as I want you to be. And you may not find me as you want me to be.

The church in Corinth had fled Paul's teaching and relationship because he appeared weak. And that meant that they'd also fled relationship with Jesus.

And Paul is worried that his expectations won't be met either. And so when he gets there, he's worried that there is going to be further conflict. Verse 20, again from the second half.

I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.

I am afraid that when I come again, my God will humble me before you. And I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of their impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

[5 : 35] Paul is fearful that when he comes back, he'll arrive and be grieved by their sin. See, they're not only fighting with Paul, they're fighting with each other and against God.

You look at that list of sins and they all damage relationships with other people. You know, discord, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, disorder, sexual impurity and debauchery.

Imagine walking into church this morning and seeing all of that in a church. But are we actually that far off?

These could all be descriptions of my heart at different times. Frustration leading to rage. Sharing of prayer points leading to gossip.

Hearing of others' success leading to jealousy and selfish ambition. These sins damage relationship with God, but they are damaging relationships in the church with each other.

[6 : 43] Paul speaks hard words to them so that they would repent, so they can be restored. Otherwise, there will be more conflict. Chapter 13, verse 2.

I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent. On my return, I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others.

Since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me, He is not weak in dealing with you, but He's powerful among you. See, Paul is going to come with proof of Christ working through him.

And he's coming with, as verse 4 tells us, with God's power to deal with their sin. Paul knows that the relationship between Corinth and him and Corinth and God has been damaged.

And this is not something that he can just ignore. He can't just be okay that they are chasing a different Jesus. He can't just sweep this under the rug and pretend that everything is fine.

[7 : 44] He doesn't ignore it, hoping that this church will get better on their own. This letter has been about dealing with the conflict head on.

And Paul says in verse 19 that this conflict has been for their strengthening. For them to be built strong following Jesus, they actually have needed this conflict.

They need to be confronted with their broken relationship. And reflecting on this whole letter, it shows the value of conflict and how to conflict well.

Now, I know that conflict is hard. Is anybody here that really enjoys conflict? No hands? No? Okay. But I think it is better to have conflict than to sit in a broken relationship.

And to pretend that everything is just fine. That everything will be better eventually. We'll just pretend. We'll sweep it under the rug. Conflict, Paul says, has been for this church, for their sake, to bring them back in relationship with Jesus and with each other.

[8 : 55] Now, we can be tempted to avoid conflict because we love other people. Christians generally love other people and we want to be nice to other people. But if we just ignore conflict, the feelings of hurt and pain will just grow and fester.

They will bubble up and eventually burst. And so you'll either flee the relationship or lash out. And neither of those options are loving.

Paul gives us a picture of how to do conflict well. He's not about bullying or just influencing this church with his will.

He has been direct with the issues. But it's for this church's strengthening, for them to be built up. He doesn't want to be a burden on them.

So he hasn't charged them. He's not taking any money from them because he wants them to listen really well. Because he's leading them from a position of love. He could have begun from the position of authority.

[10 : 00] I am your apostle. You should do what I tell you because I have this authority. But he doesn't. He shows patience and love. And he's also been up front about his own issues and his own

weaknesses.

He has not been proud. And so Paul shows us a model of love and patience when confronting sin. Direct but not inappropriate, not selfish.

Patient and loving and bringing conflict, not to win an argument but to build other people up. And he does this all aware of his own faults.

When I do marriage preparation with couples that I'm marrying, we often talk about conflict. And I talk about how important it is to fight fair and clean.

Because there's often a problem if we are too averse to fighting. You know, we're the couple that's never had a fight. And you kind of smile and nod. Sure, sure, sure. Yeah, definitely. But then there's those couples who just seem to love to fight.

[11:12] And both positions, both poles are dangerous. Conflict is helpful because it leads us to express our expectations. Paul had expectations of this church.

He wanted them to be following Jesus. And this, that Paul is hoping, would lead to them being restored. If you want to follow up what Jesus says about conflict, go and read Matthew 18.

He gives us a wonderful model for confronting someone else. Paul's directness and desire is much more than just hoping that everything would be fine Paul is seeking for them to be restored and conflict is far better it's a he shows us a good way to deal with these issues in a loving and godly way because he is aiming for full restoration of these people as he comes to the end of the letter he presses on this church with his final words so that they would have relationships that are restored and he asks in verse 5 examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith test yourselves Paul says to to take a measure of humbleness and self-reflection and have a think about where your faith is at examine yourself and Paul points to where they got their faith from they they got their faith they got their belief in Jesus from Paul's preaching itself Paul shared the gospel message of restoration and reconciliation that broken people are made whole in Christ and if they accept the message well that means they need to accept the messenger Paul himself and Paul he gives them the benefit of the doubt you know examine yourselves I'll give you the benefit of the doubt verse 6 I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test and he asks an ironic question verse 5 do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you unless of course you fail the test he's saying this in a tongue-in-cheek ironic kind of way he's not casting doubt in their faith but if Christ is in them it's because they have heard Paul's message and that he is their true apostle and they've been deceived by these super apostles to confirm Christ is to confirm Paul's role as well and so Paul rejoices in verse 9 we are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong and our prayer is that you may be fully restored Paul is glad when as an extension of the cross he suffers for their on their behalf and he is glad that as an extension of the cross uh the Jesus's resurrection from the cross that the church is strengthened and encouraged in their faith this is why Paul is so willing to be weak if he is weak it's they get to be strong and he wants them to be fully restored that's the the purpose of this letter he he is praying this right at the end it's almost it's helpful to know this at the very start of the series but here we are at the end he is praying for them to be restored examine yourself so you can be restored but it's not just Paul and this church who need to be restored because they've had conflict it's not even just this church and God because of their sin that need to be restored their relationship with each other needs to be restored to the the the parents and the children the the husbands and the wives the the friends and the enemies the the family and the church as a body needs to be restored I think this is where uh one of the very few times uh English as a language lets us down uh because English doesn't have a second person plural uh I'm not sure if you I like grammar so I'll explain this a bit so um

Paul's prayer here is for you to be restored now it's easy to read that this morning and think that it's the singular it's a we're in Sydney in an individualistic culture and we read you and we just think single person but it's not uh it's about you plural it's about this community of believers being restored uh so I'm going to appeal to two other bad translations of mine uh and the Chinese it's all about this word you in the second person plural so another way to say you uh would be use does anybody say use so Paul's prayer is that use may be fully restored or if I was going to do an American accent it'd be y'all does anybody say y'all y'all so Paul's prayer is that y'all may be fully restored or in the Chinese it's uh nimen neng cheng wei one chuan ren it's nimen you you all you in the plural because the areas of sin from chapter 12 had an impact on other people it's discord rage rage doesn't just impact one people one person it's slander gossip debauchery disorder sexual immorality rebellion from Jesus has broken relationship with Paul as their apostle and leader with

God but the people the church and now Paul presents a beautiful picture of restoration the amazing work of the one true gospel that good news that God's son died and was raised so we could have a restored relationship with God this word restoration it's also translated as complete or perfect restoration looks like taking what was broken and restoring it to what it was intended to be to go from broken to to whole and so Paul fills this picture of restoration in verse 11 of chapter 12 finally brothers and sisters rejoice strive for full restoration encourage one another be of one mind live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you greet one another with a holy kiss this picture of a restored relationship looks the opposite of their sin they are people who are encouraging one another they have one mind and they're not divided by discord and rage and slander they're living in peace with each other they're building each other up because there is no division they're going in the same direction following the Lord and Paul calls them to greet each other with a holy kiss now the ancient church it's not it's not a picture of say an Italian culture you know the Italian you know the kind of very flamboyant culture who when they greet someone it's not a handshake it's a kiss on each cheek that is not a picture here this kind of kiss behavior kiss on the cheek that kind of thing is a very personal interaction it is a very personal greeting reserved for family but Paul calls them to kiss one another in a very trans-cultural way one that recognizes that we are now all in God's family regardless of wealth or status or ethnic origin this family has grown and so we can greet one another with a holy kiss now this still sounds fairly strange to us doesn't it and Nick kind of joked are you going to get up there when you start and and greet me with a kiss I said no but maybe mate look I'm going to greet him now so look come on come on come on come on Nick brother good to see you first bearded kiss and not your last there's always tomorrow now this is this is the opposite of the picture of their sin it's its greeting with a kiss which is reserved for family instead of sexual impurity oh did you want to kiss too my son when these behaviors happen Paul says that the God of love and peace will be with them God is working through Paul's message through the spirit leading them to obey and love others and God is there here Paul is promising that God is going to be with you he's going to be with you either way he could be with you in the positive if they repent and they're restored God will be there as the God of love and peace displayed in their unity but be warned if you don't repent if you don't examine yourself God will be there Paul will come with God's power and authority to tear down so God is going to be there it could be the God of love the same God but two facets the God of love and peace or the God of justice and Paul closes with a wonderful triune blessing from God verse 14 may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all and that is such a lovely summary of this

[21 : 21] Jesus's death shows us God's grace his great love restoring us and the fellowship with the Holy Spirit enables us to obey him and to have our relationships restored with God and each other Paul has left the divided Corinthian church a way forward deal with conflict in a healthy way so there can be restoration he's called them to the God of love who takes us his people damaged and broken and lifts us out of the gutter out of the muck and he completes us he makes us whole and perfect he makes us beautiful in him at great cost to himself as I was thinking of this I was reminded of the Japanese art kintsugi can anybody pronounce that better than I can?

no? there will be a picture of the screen the art of kintsugi is where they would take a broken bowl and restore it often with resin and then gold and it's this wonderful art but what they're doing is they're taking what was broken and useless and restoring it not just restoring its function of holding things but it actually makes it far better than it was they make the bowl precious this is a picture of what God has done in us he has lifted us out of the gutter broken and useless and he has repaired us and he has made us precious not with gold but the blood of his son Paul's encouragement here is for us that we need to examine ourselves to realise that we are broken bowls who need fixing can you imagine trying to eat breakfast out of a bowl like this?

if it was broken it wouldn't work and I'd probably cut myself on one of the edges that's why dealing with conflict is so important to point out the harsh edges the broken parts and to apply God's grace like gold in bringing restoration brothers and sisters have you examined yourselves?

have you examined our face just like these masks and considered taking off our mask to be authentic? as a church community as people following Jesus when we are confident and authentic about who we are who God has made us to be this church looks wonderful we look like a bowl that was broken but has been restored to something even better a church that we can boldly declare that look we don't have it all together we're broken and messed up we're prone to rage and

selfishness and sexual impurity but God's grace is sufficient we are made precious and whole imagine church if we demonstrated humble authenticity like this we are made whole as Christ's bride as people who will one day be in full relationship with Jesus men this is a strange thing to talk about but men we are the bride of Christ too even if it's strange to think of ourselves as brides we are restored to be something amazing we are restored to be in relationship together and with God himself and so to be this people do we need to go and have some helpful conflict do we need to apologize do you need to apologize do you need to practice like Paul being weak because God is strong if you're not sure about this Jesus who restores us please come and speak with myself come and speak with Nick speak to the person next to you to find out more that love story that I told at the start it was a picture of God and the church but it is us as well everyone loves a good love story with a happy ending and we get to be like that

Kintsugi Japanese bowl the walking demonstration that God takes a broken people and restores us that he truly is the God of love and peace and so verse 14 may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship with the Holy Spirit be with you all Amen Amen to God