

Authentic Love

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. It would be great if you had a Bible in front of you, and so stick your hand up if you need one of those. We've also got some service outlines so that you can follow along where we're heading, and it'd be great if you could take some notes.

It's a fairly lengthy text, and so it'd be good to make it easy for you to follow along if you had some notes in front of you, and at least have the Bible passage open in front of you to see where it's coming from, what we're talking about.

The greatest danger to the church is not from without, but from within. It's been repeatedly demonstrated in church history.

Probably one dramatic example is that of the German Protestant church in the last century. The Bible was so undermined that very few pastors saw it as the infallible Word of God, and they had lost as a church the centrality of the gospel.

There were remarkable exceptions, like the courageous pastor Martin Nehomola. In 1933, he preached on the occasion of Martin Luther's 450th birthday about how tragic it would be if the devil filled German minds with the delusion that what they needed was not the grace of God, but the courage of Martin Luther.

[1 : 33] The very next evening, in an eerie fulfillment of his own preaching, 20,000 Christians under the umbrella of the German Evangelical Church, led by bishops and church officials in full regalia, gathered in the newly completed Berlin Sports Palace.

And after singing, Now we thank thee all, we thank, now thank we all our God, a German pastor, Joachim Hossenfelder, announced that he was implementing the infamous Aryan paragraph in his diocese that dismissed all Christian Jews from church office effective immediately, aligning the German Evangelical Church with the Nazi Party.

During the evening, it was also announced, among other things, that Nehomola was suspended, that the Bible was from now to be examined for all its non-German elements, that is, cut out all Judaism, and that a proud, heroic Jesus was to replace the model of the suffering servant who died on the cross for the sins of humanity.

The speech was interrupted again and again with the applause and the cheers of 20,000 people. Not a single bishop, not a single church leader stood to disagree. The state church had imploded from within and people's salvation was at stake.

[3 : 33] This is very similar to the picture that's happening here in the book of Corinth that we're looking at at the moment. Paul had started this church of Corinth, the gospel was preached, people became Christians, deep friendships were made, the bonds of Christian love were formed, and when Paul moved on, opponents moved in with a different gospel.

They started to drive a wedge between Paul and the church. They started to criticize Paul's life and Paul's message. And it got so bad that the church he founded started to believe that Paul was the false guy.

He was worldly, insincere, he was a coward, he was weak, he was a theological deviant who preached a false gospel. Paul, the founder, was now treated as the imposter, a false apostle, corrupt, and only in the religious business in order to exploit people.

He was seen as the fake one, someone who talked tough in letters but was a wimp face to face. And the Corinthian church in this letter is in danger of walking away from Paul, walking away from the authentic good news of Jesus Christ.

They can't see that. They think they're just being progressive but that's what Paul's fighting for here. Their very eternal life.

[5 : 09] And the major thrust of this letter is a call for them to trust him because he's the authentic apostle with the authentic gospel.

Paul's defense of his gospel and his ministry and his character in 2 Corinthians takes us right to the very heart of what it means to be a Christian leader but also what it means to be a Christ-like follower of the Lord Jesus.

Paul is making it explicitly clear what it means to be part of God's family, the family that God has called together through the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

So the section that we're dealing with today in chapter 6 verse 11 through to 7.16 and especially closing off at verse 1 and 2 of chapter 7 is the climax of Paul's defense of his ministry that he started in chapter 2 verse 14.

And this section begins with a plea from the heart to return the love that he has shown them. Have a look at chapter 6 verse 11. We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians and open wide our hearts to you.

[6 : 35] We are not withholding our affection from you but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange, I speak as to my children. Open wide your hearts also.

All that Paul has written and know this, what he is about to write comes from a heart of love.

These pages are wet with Paul's tears as he sees and he hears from this church walking away from the gospel and away from salvation in Jesus.

So there are three things I want to see and if you've got your sermon outline in front of you there, you'll see this on your page. Three things I want to see from this passage today.

Firstly, authentic love is tough love. Secondly, how authentic love leads to salvation. And thirdly, an exhortation for us here at this church to practice authentic love.

[7 : 40] So firstly, authentic love is tough love. In closing off this section of the letter, Paul opens his heart. He pleads with this church to return to him in the authentic gospel.

He says the same thing in chapter 7, verses 2 to 4. Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one. We have corrupted no one. We have exploited no one.

I do not say this to condemn you. I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or we would die with you. I have spoken to you with great frankness.

I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged in all of our troubles. My joy knows no bounds. So these are not the words of a man looking for revenge against the church that has caused him grief upon grief.

This is him calling them back to love him as he has loved them. But the second thing he does is he calls this church to abandon the false teachers and their false gospel.

[8 : 56] And Paul's words here are very strong. They are tough. They are black and white, but they come from a heart of love. See, the key is in verse 14.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. Now this verse is commonly thought of as a warning against marrying unbelievers or entering into contractual relationships with non-Christians.

It's not. That's not what this verse is about. It is a command not to be yoked together with those in the church who oppose the truth.

Unbelieving religious people in the church. This whole letter to the church of Corinth helps us to see that the unbelievers here that has been referred to are his opponents within the church.

Paul's gospel message is incompatible with their false gospel. You can't meld the two together.

[10 : 14] They're opposed to one another. And Paul's gospel, the authentic Christian gospel, as I said two weeks ago, is the good news that God sent his son into the world to live a perfect life, to die as a substitute for sinners, to absorb the anger of God, to turn it away from us, to take away our guilt and our shame, provide the gift of right standing before God, and to give eternal joy through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, alone, apart from any works of obedience, on our behalf.

So what Paul is saying here is the stakes are very high. Those Corinthians who persist in siding with Paul's opponents will in effect renounce their own salvation.

That's what they're doing. Now this is, let me just say, this is not a call from the Apostle Paul here to split theological hairs. seeing those who disagree with you in the church as unbelievers.

Church history is tragically full of theological hair splitting. Neither is this a command to bar unbelievers from the church.

I mean, church is the best place for unbelievers because they get to hear the word and be loved by the followers of Jesus. Jesus. This is a fight for eternal life.

[11:52] We are to disassociate ourselves from complicity with those who would attempt to spread a false gospel within the church.

it means to disassociate with those who insinuate, even insinuate, that reconciliation is not all of God and that you can make peace with God yourself.

Also, with those who suggest that the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross in which God made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteous of God for even those who would declare that that's not enough to withdraw from people like that.

It means to reject liberal, moralizing theories of Jesus' work of salvation. It means to reject the kind of Christianity that wants to read the Bible with a pair of scissors and cut out anything that's too hard or offensive.

It means to reject a salvation by works sentimentality that if you do your best you will make it and that good people will find their way in the end.

[13:17] It means to reject the modern abomination on the church that is doing untold damage to the poor and the vulnerable around this world.

The thing called the prosperity gospel. gospel and one of the major opponents of it over the number of past decades has been a guy named Benny Hinn.

You will see him on TV. In the past few weeks he has indicated that he is now rejecting the prosperity theology and I can only hope that his repentance is genuine.

Paul's love for this church at Corinth is not weak. it doesn't turn a blind eye to error and sin.

His love for them means he confronts it. It is an authentic robust tough love that is willing to call out error.

[14:19] Now none of us like to be the recipient of it even when we know it is for our own good.

Maybe you remember a parent saying to you this is going to hurt me more than it hurts you.

I have got to say I never understood it as a kid. When you are holding down a child so they can get a vital injection that you know that they need but your heart is breaking as they are kicking and screaming.

Paul's authentic tough love is also expressed in a letter that he wrote to them that we don't now have but he refers to here in 2 Corinthians 4 in our it was actually 4 Corinthians the letter sorry 3 Corinthians the letter which doesn't exist which we now call 2 Corinthians which is actually 4 Corinthians fourth letter to this church.

And it's expressed in this letter he called the stern letter he writes a stern letter to them to try and point out the wrong and to stir up their allegiance to the true gospel.

Let me remind you what Paul says about that letter in chapter 2 verses 3 and 4 I wrote as I did so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who would have made me rejoice I had confidence in all of you that you would share my joy for I wrote out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears not to grieve you but to let you know the depths of my love for you.

[16:09] In our modern context we want to define love as leniency and freedom and Paul's words to the Corinthians church here seems harsh uncompromising and unloving but all of his suffering on behalf of this church is in reality a reflection of a deep love for them.

So what does it lead to? What does his tough authentic love lead to? This is my second point.

From what we understand Paul probably sends this letter with Titus from somewhere to the Corinthian church from somewhere in Asia.

He then sinks into a deep depression that this letter his harsh letter might turn against Paul might cause them in fact the church to turn even more against him because of the harshness of his letter and his ministry with them would therefore be ruined forever.

That's his concern. And according to chapter 2 verse 13 he had hoped to meet Titus with news of the response from the church of Corinth in Troas.

[17:30] But Titus didn't show up and Paul descends into a depression. Then we skip to chapter 7 verse 5 and we read that Paul crossed over on over into Macedonia struggling all the way with external conflicts and internal fears.

This harsh letter has got him really worked up. Finally Titus arrives comes with the news from Corinth in verses 6 and 7 the letter worked Paul it worked and Paul writes these rich words in verses 8 and 10 of chapter 7 even if I cause you sorrow by my letter I do not regret it though I did regret it I see that my letter hurt you but only for a little while yet now I am happy not because you were made sorry but because your sorrow led to repentance for you became sorrowful as God

intended and so were not harmed in any way by us godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret but worldly sorrow brings death so the Corinthians this church experienced the godly sorrow and as verse 10 says that it was over the way they had fallen for Paul's opponents and the way that they had mistreated Paul they repented of believing a false gospel it's the grief of regret over a past sin and it's called godly sorrow notice in verse 10 that the opposite of godly sorrow is not feeling no sorrow at all but feeling worldly sorrow sorrow this is crucial this is a really important point you can feel sorry for something in a worldly way which leads to death so what we need to do is we need to distinguish godly sorrow from worldly sorrow what's the difference between those two worldly sorrow sorrow is when you feel sorry for something you did because it starts to backfire on you leads to humiliation or it leads to punishment worldly sorrow is a reflex of a proud and fearful ego pride will always regret making a fool of itself it's the one thing pride doesn't want to do it doesn't want to make a fool of itself and fear will always regret acts that jeopardize comfort and safety feeling sorry for something that we've done simply apologizing is in itself no sign of a virtue at all apologizing for a mistake is not in and of itself a sign of a good thing it's not virtuous in and of itself godly sorrow is the reflex of a conscience that has wounded god's ego godly sorrow grieves that god's name has come into disrepute the focus of godly sorrow is god godly sorrow is owing to god's word putting a finger on sin in our lives worldly sorrow is owing to the attitudes of people whose praise we don't want to lose we can feel extremely sorry for something we've done if we detect that the people around us think it's stupid or silly or reprehensible the word of people not god become the criteria of guilt and shame in worldly sorrow Paul said at the end of verse 7 at the beginning of verse 9 that he rejoiced over what the Corinthians had experienced he's saying here that godly sorrow is a good thing but it's like saying pain is a good thing we don't really mean that pain all by itself is a good thing we mean that in a world where you can bleed to death it's good to feel pain when you cut as I experienced a couple of weeks ago it's good to feel pain when you cut it's good to feel pain before the tumor becomes inoperable it's good to feel pain before the infection leads to gangrene godly sorrow is to sin what pain is to a disease of course there are guilt and shame feelings that are unhealthy just like there is pain that is psychosomatic it does not signal any real disease there is such a thing as false guilt and false shame but real guilt and real sorrow is good and it should not be avoided instead of running from them we should face them head on admit the disease and seek a deeper cure in Christ rather than just the fridge or revenge why is godly sorrow good because it produces repentance verse 9 says that Paul's joy was not based merely on the guilt that the Corinthians had felt but on the repentance it produced yet now I am happy not because you were made sorry but because your sorrow led you to repentance and then in verse 10 it states the general truth godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation the first thing to notice is that repentance is not identical with grief and sorrow over sin they're not the same thing repentance is a result of grief and sorrow over sin to feel sorry to feel grief or guilt or regret over a past sin is not the same as repenting repentance is the change of attitude or behavior that comes when you feel remorse over a sin

[25 : 13] I think it would be wise to say that godly sorrow is the first step of repentance repentance follows and completes the change of heart the test of whether our sorrow is of God or is of the world is whether it actually produces change that's the test between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow repentance is turning away from and renouncing one way and pursuing another repentance is literally a 180 degree turn I used to do this I have been confronted by my sin and now I am going to do this my attitude and my behavior heads this direction in verses 7 and 11 Paul describes the change he heard about in the Corinthians CA writes it their indifference to his presence had turned to longing their rejection of his authority had turned to zeal and he lists a whole range of other things does not immobilize you into the pits of depression it is temporary and it brings change it's temporary and it brings change notice that last phrase in verse 8

I see that my letter hurt you but only for a little while it's temporary you see if the feeling of sorrow and guilt over past sin hold you in its grip so long after the sin is past so long after you've had an attitude or an action then it's not the grief of God it's the grief of the world if you cannot forgive yourself from a past sin that is worldly sorrow not godly sorrow if satan cannot keep you from regretting your sin then he will do his best to keep you from enjoying your forgiveness if he fails in his attempt to keep you from grieving over sin he will do his best to turn your godly grief into an ongoing bondage of unwarranted guilt and shame godly sorrow throws us to the foot of the cross for

mercy to the foot of the cross and the victory of

Christ won for us over all guilt and shame which leads me to the salvation that godly sorrow produces what is the evidence that their faith in the lord Jesus is genuine the answer of chapter 7 verse 10 would be there is a path that leads to salvation and there is a path that leads to death the way to test your faith is to test which path you are on the path that leads to salvation is not the path of sinless perfection it is the path of godly sorrow and genuine repentance an all of life ongoing activity godly sorrow genuine repentance verse 10 godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret godly sorrow is good godly sorrow produces repentance and therefore godly sorrow leads to salvation so can you identify a sin that god's particularly pointing at you in your life right now through his word is there a particular sin that he is causing you to grieve over right now or is it just more comfortable to say a confession a general one and just rattle off the tongue and go there you go confession is done with for this week could you even think when you said that general confession a specific sin that god's working on in your life right now that's causing you grief love so this is crucial for us the third point an exhortation to practice authentic tough love every single one of us have core values that drive the way we behave our attitudes most of them we don't even know what they are they're not stated but they've been inherited the things that from our past and heritages that we got and one of the core values that shapes our behavior at St. Paul's we kind of want to make them explicit because it drives everything that we do culturally the way that we operate and they're on the walls behind this wall just here out there in the atrium one of our core values that shapes our behavior is called treasuring Jesus together the word together there is very important we value watching over our lives in love so that none of us miss out on such a great salvation by pulling away from Jesus so with treasuring Jesus together in mind as a core value there are at least two ways that this applies to be willing to cause godly sorrow and secondly be willing to accept godly sorrow both of these are not easy and that's why for the most part we're happy to participate in a level of community that doesn't get too deep after church rush off as soon as we possibly can come to community group spasmodically make general prayer points like

I need help for an exam this week very rarely confess error and sin we need to this passage is driving us deeper and deeper and deeper into relationship with one another in the Lord Jesus we are seeking to go to do life together quite differently than our surrounding society for some of us our cultural heritage means we ignore hard but important conversations because what we prefer is the appearance of harmony rather than actual harmony with God and with each other for others others of us our cultural heritage means that we think the world revolves around us as individuals and so no one can tell me to do and anyone saying anything against my life at all is a total affront to my personhood on top of that all of us exist in a western society if you're living here in

[32 : 49] Sydney you're existing in a western society and resilience relational resilience and emotional resilience is an almost non existent we break easily like emotionally fragile quitters that we are someone speaks a home truth to us and we run a mile and therefore we never grow sometimes someone speaks a home truth to us and it's like we've got to take a week off work and go and see the GP because you can't cope with it so these applications are really important number one be willing to cause godly sorrow sorrow when I say cause godly sorrow I don't mean cause your brother or sister to sin I'm not saying that I'm not saying push them into sin and I want to clarify this and say it is causing godly sorrow is coming from a heart of love not a heart of revenge what

I mean by causing godly sorrow is to help them recognise their sin to have that awkward conversation it's never easy we can take heart that Paul did not find it easy his heart was troubled we need to risk being rejected and criticised when we care about someone enough to in humility put a finger on sin to put a finger on unbelief and a false gospel but we should do it anyway it could be that their salvation is at stake and you are God's way of bringing them back to the path of repentance that leads to life secondly be willing to accept godly regret it's always embarrassing you may have had this experience yourself it's always embarrassing when someone points out that you got food and they're trying to subtly do it and what you do in that moment is you replay every conversation that you've had ever since your last eight and you go oh my goodness every time I smile has that thing been there it's so embarrassing but it is so crucial for us once you get over the initial embarrassment I realize how grateful I am that someone has taken the courage to point out to me the thing that I can't see myself you see pride is not only our greatest enemy but it's also a deceptive enemy the deceptive power of pride often blinds us to the flaws that other people can see

clearly this is one of the reasons we need each other sin is subtle blinding and deceitful and we need feedback from others to understand our heart and if I'm going to see myself clearly I need others to hold the mirror of God's word up to me to help me this is the encouragement from Hebrews chapter 3 verses 12 to 13 see to it brothers that none of you has a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God but encourage one another daily as long as is called today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness we should be willing to accept godly sorrow it is crucial that we surround ourselves with Christian friends brothers who don't agree with us but Christian brothers and sisters who love us and care for us enough and who aren't afraid of us to highlight the sin that we ourselves can't see have you experienced it I've experienced it on so many occasions so many occasions

I remember a good Christian brother one day driving along with him and he just spent a couple of days he and his wife spent a couple of days with Nat and I and he said to me we'll drive along and he said Steve I just want to have a quick word with you about something he said I sort of go out on a limb here he said you and Nat you have this great relationship with he said but since I last saw you I just noticing that the bantering has got a little bit more of a barb to it from you how are you going how are you going because I don't think you're treating that well right now I'm like wow man we're going to Bunnings to get a coffee that's what you do when you go to Bunnings and you throw this one on me half an hour later having reflected on had a quick conversation

[38 : 23] I said brother I'm so grateful that you did that any other you know can you help me can you pray with me on this one can you keep me accountable if you see it happening in the next couple of days can you pull me aside and go that's what I'm talking about right there you cannot effectively watch yourself by yourself you need the discerning eyes of others and I just want to say just being together isn't good enough it is vital for us to be meeting together for biblical fellowship for prayer and accountability but it's not enough in itself if church and small groups are going to be a means of grace and growth in our lives then two things are required humbly recognizing a need for others and active participation for the sake of others my first draft said aggressive participation

I love that word but might have had the wrong connotations for you we must pursue humble and proactive participation with each other never forgetting that others see what we don't where I am blind to sin other people have got 20-20 vision by God's grace they can impart clarity and they can help protect me from the deceiving and the hardening effects of sin in my life those dear brothers and sisters in Christ who love me enough to speak a word of correction are a gift from God in and it's true that their perception may not be 100% accurate so I do not need to be put off by that humility does not require mathematical precision it postures itself to receive

God's grace from every avenue including the harsh word of an enemy where 2% is right is enough to bring around change in your life I read this quote from a book called Resident Aliens Life in the Christian Colony how is falsehood confronted except in a manner that always seems severe to the one tangled in deceit the cost of not confronting our deceit is high also nothing less than the death of our life together in the church the church was called to be a colony an alternative family a different community a sign a signal to the world that Jesus Christ has made a way possible for life together unlike anything the world has seen or will ever see not to confront lies and deceit greed and self service sin and error and false gospels is the death of the church we seek to treasure Jesus and his gospel together for God's glory and the joy of all peoples here in this church of St. Paul's and this requires us to watch over our life and our doctrine together