

So far, Paul has been teaching the Corinthians about his relationship with them, but this can be extended to apply generally to relationships between fellow members of the body of Christ. One of the main reasons we moved the service to the B building was to force us to be closer together, because relationships in church are of the utmost importance. In 6:11-13 Paul describes the type of relationship we should have in church, one where our hearts are open wide to each other.

Now in chapter 7 Paul refers back to his “harsh” letter to the Corinthians. Recall that 1 and 2 Corinthians are the second and fourth letters in a series of four letters Paul wrote to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians, Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their selfishness, infighting, and sexual immorality. After this letter, the Corinthians did not change, so Paul wrote the third letter, which was the “harsh” letter. This was a much more severe rebuke, but it was written with love and contained the truth the Corinthians needed to hear. Paul was terrified about how they would receive it, and whether it would ruin their relationship. Despite the severity of the letter, Paul states in vv. 2-4 that they still have such an important place in his heart. And when Titus came back from Corinth, he told Paul that the Corinthians still longed for Paul, which was a relief for Paul (vv. 5-7).

In v. 8, Paul says that he does not regret the severe letter because it was truthful and led to repentance. This is the focus of this chapter. If we are to have this open relationship with each other, we must drop the façades. We have to be honest and loving enough to say words that might sound hurtful but come from an open and understanding heart that is genuinely concerned for the spiritual health of others. Back at my home church, I was once told by Samantha, a youth group leader, that I was not serving God enough. This hurt for a while, but after a while, I realized it was true. She knew that those words could offend me and that I could take it personally, but my relationship with God was more important to her than that. Relationships in church are not just to make us feel good. We encourage each other but also sometimes we need to receive guidance or rebuke from each other also. I’m not telling you to go out and find things to rebuke people about, but from the other end, we should be more open to listen to people who rebuke us without harboring resentment towards them or taking it too personally. This is something I struggle with too. But if we look at v. 9 we find that the Corinthians received Paul’s rebuke well, by humbly repenting of their ways. It’s not easy to admit you’re wrong, especially to those who are under your authority. For example, it was difficult to apologize to my sons for being cross with them. Do you have the humility to absorb rebuke and admit you are wrong? 2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is useful for teaching, reproof (doctrinal correction), training, and rebuking. We tend to be eager to rebuke but less so to receive rebuke. Let us follow the Corinthians’ example and humbly receive rebuke.

Verse 10 is the focal point of the chapter. It says that godly sorrow brings about repentance that leads to salvation, and leaves no regret. First, if we rebuke, it should be for the purpose of turning someone back to God. It should be about spiritual things with eternal value. Then, humble acceptance of rebuke leads to repentance. Those who stray are brought back if they listen to rebuke. This repentance leads to salvation, and therefore there is no regret. On the other hand, worldly sorrow leads to death. Again, if you rebuke, make sure you are not just being nosy, bossy, or judgmental. You should rebuke someone with love and genuine concern, and it

should be about things that directly affect their spiritual walk. Anything other than that has no eternal value and leads to death.

Although it's not easy to accept rebuke, ultimately if it is received with humility, it leads to spiritual growth. When I talked to Stephanie about the way she viewed material things like cars, she humbly listened and now she is much more conscientious than many others about these things. When we see past the hurt and recognize the value in the sentiment and the words of those offering guidance, then we will grow spiritually. Relationships in church are not just about feeling good. We pray that God may use us to comfort, teach, train, and even rebuke each other so that we will be strengthened in faith.