

You Hurt Me...To Save Me

2 Corinthians 7:8-13a (NIV)

⁸ Even if I caused 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—⁹ yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. ¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. ¹¹ See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. ¹² So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. ¹³ By all this we are encouraged.

There is one particular moment from the baby years that is burned into my memory. I remember very distinctly the 6-month-old checkup that included vaccination shots. We sat the little guy down on that awkwardly shaped patient table and backed away. He still had smiles and was happy. Then each of the nurses stuck a needle into each of his thighs with the vaccines. The look on his face went from happy go lucky to sheer terror and pain. It stung me as a father because I remember my son looking at me with tears in his eyes and an expression as if to say, “Why are you letting them hurt me?” I get it, bud. I let them give you the shots. I let them hurt you and sat there without stopping them. I tried to comfort him afterwards, but I had betrayed him. He wanted only Mom to hold him. “You hurt me.”

Paul knew that when he had finished writing his letter to the Christians in Corinth that it was going to hurt them. He was calling them out on their sins. They had created divisions in their congregation based on preachers. They proudly tolerated adultery and treated sex as nothing more than an appetite that needed to be satiated. They brought public lawsuits against their fellow Christians without working it out amongst themselves. They turned the Lord’s Supper into a glutenous feast that left people out, left people hungry. And there was more.

What if I did that to you?

Today is the official start of The Great Multitude Challenge. What if the elders and I had created this challenge and sent you a letter and called you to be here just so that we could read off a rap sheet of your personal sins to everyone in the congregation? John Doe. He muttered 57 curse words this week. He got angry with other driver 4 out of 5 times to work. He drank too much on Friday night. He viewed pornography twice this week. He was rude to his coworkers on Wednesday, made fun of one on Thursday. He skipped church on Sunday because he didn’t feel like getting out of bed... What if I inserted your name into those statements? What if the elders and I challenged you to be here just so that we could hurt you and tear you down by reliving and reminding you of your sins? If that was our purpose, I would expect you to leave right now – in anger, embarrassment, and/or disgust – and never come back. Maybe others of you would wait, looking at me in confusion wondering how I’m going to turn this around because surely I wouldn’t do this to you, that I wouldn’t use my position as pastor to hurt you like that.

Yet, this is part of what I do in our worship every time, don’t I? Now, I don’t list your names and your sins, but I point them out. The sermons often fixate on something that we aren’t doing right when it comes to our relationship with God, and you feel guilty over what is said here, hearing that you sinned so bad that God should cast you away to eternal death, that all of us should be nothing more than dust and ashes. Just as we did when we started our worship tonight, we owned up and confessed that every single one of us has failed God, sinned against him and each other.

And we don’t just do this in worship. We also do this one on one with people. We call out sin. We correct our kids. We call out our spouses when they sin – especially when it’s against us. How many times have you thought or said, “You hurt me”? But why? Why hurt me?

Paul had hurt the Corinthian Christians, and he acknowledged that hurt. But was he sorry? Because when you hurt someone, you should be sorry, right? Well, he was kind of sorry, but not really. He told them: “Even if I caused 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...” (verse 8) “I’m sorry, but I’m not sorry.” Paul hurt the Corinthian Christians by calling out their sins, but he knew it was to benefit them. “Yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you 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...” (verses 9-10a)

Because of their sorrow over their sins, sins which would inevitably lead to their death, they turned away from them. They turned instead to God to take away their sin. They trusted God to wipe away all their sins, to wash them and make them clean, to create in them a new heart, to clothe them with Jesus' holiness that he had lived for them. They repented, turned away. Being hurt by the confrontation of their sins, they were saved. Paul hurt them to save them.

You hurt me to save me? Yeah. This is like a father who takes his baby boy to the doctor for a 6-month-old checkup and lets the nurses stab him with two needles simultaneously to administer vaccinations. He knows this will cause his son pain, but he knows it will also protect him against diseases that would otherwise harm him and possibly kill him. It's like the doctor who needs to break a bone to reset it so that it heals properly and doesn't cause you worse trouble down the line. This is like the surgeon who has to hurt you with an incision made with his scalpel in order to cut out cancerous cells or an infected organ so that you will live and not die. There are things worth doing that cause people pain but are done to save someone's life.

Is this the attitude we take when confronting sin? Do we confront people with the boldness of God's law, a law that cuts and condemns the heart that gave the offense? Or do we confront sin in a way that is gossip, speaking behind someone else's back about what they are doing wrong – not to get advice, not for help of figuring out how to confront it, but pointing it out to tear the other person down and make myself feel better? Do I confront sin out of anger, that I am mad at the person and so I point out what they do wrong so that they are lowered a peg or two?

This cannot be our attitude in confronting sin – to hurt someone by pointing out their sin because we are mad at them, because we want to lower them, because we want to feel better about ourselves. Paul let the Corinthian Christians know that this was not his reason for hurting them by pointing out their sin. "So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are." (verse 12) Paul hurt them to save them, to lead them to godly sorrow which turned around their lives from their sin and instead pointed them to God and his forgiveness. Paul hurt them so that in the end they would turn to God and so be forgiven and strengthened in their faith in him and confirmed in their salvation. On top of all that, he sees the blessings in hurting them by confronting their sins. "See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter." (verse 11) The hurt had produced godly responses.

When we confront people with their sins, hurt them by pointing out what they have done wrong, we must do it from the same place of wanting to save them and strengthen their faith in God for their salvation. Really, this is what we are doing here on Ash Wednesday. I told you all that you are so horribly sinful that you are going to die for your sins. Dust you are; to dust you will return. I do this not to hurt you because I am hurting from my sins, not to hurt you so that I feel a little bit better about myself while taking pleasure in you being brought low, to hurt you so that I lock you into a sort of fear that you come back to me because you are afraid of your impending death caused by your sin. I hurt you when I point out your sin to lead you to the godly sorrow that brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret. I point out your sin so that you are so saddened by it that you can't live with it and have to get rid of it. I point out your sin so that I can point you to your Savior, to see the one who died the death we should have died on the cross. My goal is to cut that sin from your life and stitch you up and heal you with your Savior from sin – Jesus' blood and his righteousness given and poured out for you in, with, and under the bread and the wine of his Supper. Jesus is the only cure to our fatal sinful state.

It hurts to confront our sins, but we are healed and saved as we are washed clean by his blood and made pure by God, whiter than snow. God's own arm has worked this salvation for you. This is why we as part of the great multitude gather around the Lamb and worship him. The Lamb has taken our fatal sins on himself. He was hurt in order to save us. By his cross, we are forgiven. By his life, we are made holy and delivered from eternal death. We are hurt. We are saved. Amen.