

Series: Living to Be a Witness

Lesson #3: “Living to Forgive”

***Announcements, encouragement to invite people and opening prayer.**



Connect: an opportunity for people to immediately interact and connect with each other; icebreaker/attention getters. **Icebreaker:** Have you ever had someone go after the character of someone who was a close friend or mentor? How did it make you feel? Is it easy to restore a relationship with someone who slandered your friend, even after they've admitted it and were sorry?

Bottom Line: Forgiveness is a non-negotiable for those who want to walk in faith. Christ is our example of forgiveness. He wants us to embrace the fact that forgiveness makes a “holy” statement. It begins in leadership but should be the heart of everyone who claims Christ is Lord of their lives.

LESSON PLAN

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-16

Background: In 2 Corinthians Paul refers to a previous letter that had sent to the Corinthians. He isn't referring to the 1 Corinthians letter because this was a very pointed letter about dealing with a specific issue that needed addressed and church discipline was to be carried out. However, the only item in the first letter is the incestuous affair the man was having with his step-mother in 1 Corinthians 5. Someone was hurting others and someone was being hurt. Whatever this issue was, Paul has forgiven the person involved and was glad he addressed the issue. The results were that the Corinthian Church had done the right thing and therefore had grown tremendously.

Most scholars agree that there was most likely someone slandering Paul severely in the church, people were being hurt by it and it had to be dealt with or the church would divide. If that were not the case there would be no reason for Paul to say that he forgave him, as you will later see, and that they should follow his example. So, there seems to be a lost letter that was written to Corinth between what we call the first and second letters. Corinth had a wealth of issues in the church. It took a lot of time and attention to keep it focused. Let's go back and see what Paul can tell us about this problem.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4

1. Why didn't Paul return in person to see the Christians in the church at Corinth?

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Paul evidently had to come down on them quite hard to resolve some major issue. He wanted them to know that it wasn't because he or the Apostles were their masters like slave owners. Rather, it was because of the victory that could result if he were honest with them, guiding them on how to do the right thing in this divisive matter plaguing the church.

2. What was the purpose of Paul's ministry to the Corinthian Christians?

Question: How important is the teaching of church discipline to the health of every church? Do we really have any right to judge others?

I Corinthians 5 taught the church that we are to judge those inside the church and leave the unbelievers to God to judge. By judging Paul means holding each other accountable to living out the Word. If someone is disobeying the Word of God blatantly, they are being hypocritical in their faith and it shows Christ's body as unholy. The only purpose within us is restoration of the one or ones in error, not egotistical or arrogant manipulation.

3. How does Paul describe his last visit to Corinth?

Question: What happens when we ignore a serious issue hoping it will go away or feeling like we are just being full of grace?

Question: Can you think of any issues, outside our church, where you've seen this play out badly?

4. What example do you see in humility Paul displayed when addressing the issue?

Interaction: Paul sets the portrait for the way godly leadership should deal with church issues. Describe the pattern the Eldership should follow if they are truly in step with the Holy Spirit in this matter.

It cannot be ignored. There needs to be a well-thought out and prayed over spiritual strategy and they need to be humble, broken, hurting that this MUST be addressed immediately. They

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are the protectors, the shepherds of the flock.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

5. Notice that Paul seems to be the target, but he is not worried about himself, but about those who have been hurt by the issue that seems to have been spread among the church. This statement points the issue toward gossip and slander. There were various times people would try to say Paul wasn't a real apostle like the twelve.

Question: What are some of the ways people in the church are hurt by gossip and slander worse than the target of the accusations?

6. What was to follow the church discipline that was taken?

7. What was the purpose of reaching out to the ex-divisive person?

Questions: What should you do if someone was disciplined and they left the church?

Restoration is still important no matter where we worship. We are one body in Christ. We are part of the universal church. Without healing, the stories spread to other churches who doubt the Spirit's work in that church. We too often forget we are one body in Christ.

8. Does it seem a little arrogant that Paul would say he was testing them? Why or why not?

If Paul had not tested them, he would have had to go to Corinth and take care of matters to save the church. However, that would not have produced the godly leadership that it evidently did. Paul had to teach them how to lead in the wisdom of God without him coming to do it for them. Godly leadership is developed with careful instruction and testing. Had Paul went and handled it personally, they would have had no test to move them forward in skills that would produce holiness.)

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9. Why specifically does Paul say that working out forgiveness is so critical to the ministry of the church?

Action step: If there is anyone of faith you are or have been divided against, even if you were in the right, why not send them an encouraging letter or email or call and invite them to go have coffee? Wouldn't it be great if the church started healing its old wounds and strengthening the world-wide body of Christ?

Final Question: What is the one idea that stands out to you most from this lesson?



Interactive Teaching Ideas: ideas for learner-focused teaching. (*Have the people at each table privately think about someone they have drifted away from in the faith over the years. Pray quietly for God to give you the right words to say in a letter, email, phone call or over lunch with that person. After a few moments, the leader will close with a final prayer for extending the hand of forgiveness and love.*