

Week 3, 2 Corinthians 2: 5–17

Hook



Main Point: Believers forgive others because we have been forgiven through Christ.

Current Event: Being mindful of what you eat is wise, but the pursuit to drop the pounds can lead one to make rash diet decisions. Below are some of the oddest diet plans that have been developed through the years.

1. The Freegan Diet – Freegans adopt a vegan diet and eat only food that they find for free. These dieters are known for foraging for wild plants and exploring dumpsters for discarded food.
2. Breatharianism – Folks who follow this diet attempt to substitute food and water with spirituality and sunlight.
3. Fletcherism – Horace Fletcher advised that dieters chew their food about 100 times per minute and consume only its liquids. All solid foods would be spit out.¹

What is the oddest diet that you've tried?

Apart from being mindful of what you eat, what healthy habits have you developed in your life? What caused you to implement these habits?

Transition: Today's lesson will examine a truly healthy habit—forgiving others.

¹ <http://www.forbes.com/2010/07/08/diet-weight-loss-health-forbes-woman-well-being-women.html>

Week 3, 2 Corinthians 2: 5–17

Book

Main Point: Believers forgive others because we have been forgiven through Christ.

Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 2:5–17 In this chapter, Paul challenges the church to immediately forgive and restore a once divisive man. He then thanks God that he gets to be part of Christ's triumphant procession in the world, where the weak and the vulnerable are the most effective in spreading the Gospel.

2 Corinthians 2:5–11 [Read]

Sub-Point: Christians love well by forgiving well.

Verses 5–9 The good news for Paul is threefold:

1. The majority of the Corinthians had repented of their opposition toward him.
2. The church practiced biblical church discipline regarding the offender (the leader of the opposition against Paul), casting him out of fellowship until he repented.²
3. Following the discipline, the offender had clearly repented of his oppositional attitude.

Although these 3 results are wonderful, there is a problem: the church has not forgiven the offender and has no desire to do so. They are not willing to practice the ultimate *goal* of discipline: biblical *restoration*.

The Corinthians had been led astray and wounded by a leader. They were understandably scared to let this overseer back in the fold. Paul uses verse 5 to empathize with them to a strong degree, stating that any one person's pain is really a church-wide pain. When one member of the body of Christ hurts, the whole body feels.

However, Paul does not linger in the idea of pain very long. He pushes the Corinthians past the wounds, urging them to forgive the repentant sinner (vv. 6–9). Paul's pastoral heart shines through in these verses,³ as he expresses two desires: unity for the Corinthian church and restoration for the sorrowful offender.

Paul fears that if the church does not rightly restore him, the sorrowful offender will be swallowed up in despair over his actions, considering himself cut off from God's love. Paul is

² Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2226.

³ Harris, 434.

quite certain their discipline against the offender has been “enough.”⁴

How would you describe Paul’s forgiveness of the rebellious leader in chapter 2?

According to verse 7, what could possibly happen if these believers do not forgive the man who caused them pain?

In what ways is offering forgiveness a healthy thing to do?

Why did Paul write to them, according to verse 9? How difficult do you find it to be obedient in regard to forgiving others?

Verses 10–11 According to Paul, the church’s practice of forgiveness is so radical and potent that it has the power to outsmart Satan’s schemes (v. 11). One of the enemy’s most disastrous ploys is unforgiveness in the church, which creates division instead of unity, and Paul says believers can be aware of this tactic and fight it head-on. How? By practicing forgiveness, knowing that we ourselves have been forgiven in Christ. Restoring a repentant offender is not the “nice” thing to do, it’s the *only* thing to do—if believers want to abide in Christ and outsmart the Enemy.

In what ways is withholding forgiveness dangerous?

How does your offense to God inform how you deal with those who offend you?

Section Application Paul considers forgiveness not just an act of kindness, but a test of our very obedience to Christ (v. 9). To be like Jesus, we not only practice church discipline, but we also must practice its goal: *restoration*. Kent Hughes fittingly sums it up: “Obedience to God’s Word demands doing the hard work of church discipline, and then the hard work of forgiving.”⁵ After all, forgiven people forgive people.

Explain how your unforgiveness or forgiveness of one person could spread throughout your church. How does this move from you to an entire congregation?

Is there anyone in your life who has sought forgiveness for something, yet you still distance yourself or harbor bitterness? How can you tangibly offer the relationship back to that person this week or “reaffirm your love” for him/her?

⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, revised ed., vol. 8, *2 Corinthians: an Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 133.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

2 Corinthians 2:12–17 [Read]

Sub-Point: When we forgive, we display God’s grace and His victory over sin.

Verses 12–13 These are Paul’s final words on his recent conduct, proving once again to the Corinthians of his genuine love for them.⁶ After Paul sent his severe letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus, he dispatched Titus to find out how they received it. As he traveled to Troas to preach the Gospel, Paul was anxious and pastorally exhausted. He was waiting to hear how the tense situation in Corinth was going after the troubled congregation read his letter.

While he waited for the report, his ministry in Troas flourished. This left Paul caught between two worlds in his ministry—reluctant to leave God’s work in this growing church but desperate to hear about the Corinthians. In the end, Paul said goodbye to Troas and moved on to Macedonia where he could hopefully be reunited with Titus and learn of the state of the Corinthians.

These verses teach us two things about Paul. First, Paul had a *pastoral heart*. This account truly communicates just how much he loved the Corinthians.⁷ Additionally, Paul had a *strategic mind*. Since the Corinthian controversy was contending against his true apostleship, he knew what was at stake if this dispute did not get resolved soon; the future of the entire apostolic church was hanging in the balance. To Paul, the church being founded on true apostleship mattered more than temporary ministry success.

Which comes more naturally for you—a pastoral heart or a strategic mind? How has this impacted your ministry?

Verses 14–17 Paul uses the imagery of a “triumphal procession” in verse 14 to communicate how he viewed his current state and his ministry. In the Roman world, “triumphal processions” were public spectacles put on by victorious generals to show off their most recent conquests. The army general would lead the procession from the front. Surrounded by proud Roman soldiers, the vanquished prisoners of war would walk in the train of the procession, publically ridiculed by local onlookers, until they finally met their death at the end of the procession. At this point, they were sacrificed to the Roman gods.⁸

How did Paul see himself in relation to this analogy? Paul considered himself the vanquished captive in the scenario! Though he was once an enemy of Christ, harming his people and defaming his name, Paul considers himself now “conquered” by the grace of Jesus and follows him in his triumphal procession. In Paul’s mind, as he follows Jesus, his proclamation of the Gospel leads eventually to his death—whether that means ultimately dying for his faith or

⁶ Harris, 454.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Harris, 455-456.

“dying daily” for the cause of Christ.

In Paul’s mind, the “sacrifice” of all that he has faced and will face is worth it. To be Christ’s bondservant is the best place in the procession, even if it requires suffering and places one in the vulnerable position. Paul asserts that the Gospel will only be spread through a posture of weakness and captivity to God’s grace.

Paul presents another analogy, this one harkens back to the sacrificial system (v. 15). Paul’s life was a sacrifice; he refers to himself as the aroma of Christ (Romans 12:1).⁹ As Paul preached the Gospel, it became the fragrance of life to those who accepted Christ and the stench of death to those who rejected him.¹⁰

This task seems overwhelming and Paul asks “who is sufficient for these things?” The answer: no one. Believers must rely on the power of Christ.

The way in which Paul views himself and his ministry sets him apart from the self-interested false teachers. These frauds “peddle” God’s Word for their own profit (v. 17).

Through what vessel is the knowledge of Christ spread, according to verse 14?

Why is this way of viewing our relationship to Christ so countercultural?

Section Application Paul lived a life of sacrifice and we are called to do the same. We must daily choose to die to our own causes and pick up the cause of Christ, spreading the fragrance of Him everywhere we go, no matter how it smells to others.

⁹ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 559–560.

¹⁰ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 559–560.

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Took



Main Point: Believers forgive others because we have been forgiven through Christ.

Historic Event: In 1937 the U.S. government began to regulate the use of odorants in gas. This decision followed a tragic disaster in New London, Texas, in which a large collection of unnoticed wet-gas built up in the crawl space of the Consolidated School of New London. The school exploded and shook the nation into action. Today a mandate exists that any combustible gas within a distribution line and transmission line must contain an odorant that a person with a typical sense of smell can detect.¹¹ This effort helps folks realize a danger that otherwise would go unnoticed.

What are the hidden dangers of withholding forgiveness?

Have you been withholding forgiveness from someone in your life?

Lesson Conclusion: With the dark and difficult backdrop of Paul's extreme emotional and pastoral distress during this time, his Christlikeness shines through with remarkable brightness in these verses. Like Jesus, though Paul has been slandered, questioned, ridiculed and embarrassed, he responds immediately and gently to the repentant, and challenges others to do the same. We must heed his word and offer arms of comfort to the repentant, not holding any sins for which Christ has already paid over their heads. Just as Jesus took the fragile and vulnerable position of the Cross to magnify the Father's great love, Paul willingly takes the same type of weak posture in order to magnify Christ the Conqueror—the great ruler who seizes His enemies with overpowering love and grace. Like Paul, we must join the procession of Christ as He makes His way through the world, as bondservants captive to His great love, spreading the sweet fragrance of His Gospel to all those who would receive it.

Challenge

Be quick to forgive. Don't hold back forgiveness from someone. Recognize that you don't have the right to seek justice. True justice is God's. Jesus says the one who *forgives much* will be

¹¹ <http://naturalgasodorization.com/gas-odorization-history/>

forgiven of much. Along those same lines, understanding the forgiveness you've received in Christ should manifest itself in the way you forgive others.

Encourage others toward speedy forgiveness. Scripture gives believers the position to call out sin and encourage the growth of godliness in one another's lives. In this way, encourage others in your life to forgive those who have wronged them. Forgiveness doesn't mean sweeping things under the rug. It does mean letting go of offense and leaving that up to the Lord. Push others toward forgiveness, just as in Christ, God forgave them.

Reflect on Christ's work for you. Forgiveness becomes easier the more we reflect on the nature of Christ's work on our behalf. Through His death, He absorbed God's wrath meant for us and issued us forgiveness for sin. God's children have been greatly forgiven of much in Jesus. Knowing this, His children must be the most forgiving people because they understand truly what it means to be forgiven.