

Fostering Maturity not Dependency

Sunday, December 14, 2025

- **Last week's exhortation:** Rather than denying your weakness, or using it as an excuse, ask yourself: "Why has the Lord given me this weakness and what does He want to do through it?"

INTRO

- **We are going verse-by-verse, in a topical study through I & II Corinthians**
 - **Current Topic:** Leadership – What it looks like to have authority under Christ
 - We have covered 5 major topics in our topical study of 1 & 2 Corinthians together: Being in Christ Alone, Living by the Spirit, Becoming Mature, Church Relationship, and now lastly, Leadership.
 - So far in this topic we've seen that God gives people authority so that they can serve others, that godly leadership is measured by how closely it matches Jesus, and what it means to lead out of our weakness as Jesus did.
 - In today's lesson, the final in this series, we're going to see that godly leaders must seek to develop maturity in those they lead, rather than keeping them dependent on the leader. We're going to explore the steps of how a godly leader does that, as demonstrated in Paul's closing words in 2 Corinthians.

READ

2 Corinthians 13 CSB

¹ This is the third time I am coming to you. **Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.** ² I gave a warning when I was present the second time, and now I give a warning while I am absent to those who sinned before and to all the rest: If I come again, I will not be lenient, ³ since you seek proof of Christ speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but powerful among you. ⁴ For he was crucified in weakness, but he lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by God's power. ⁵ Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test. ⁶ And I hope you will recognize that we ourselves do not fail the test. ⁷ But we pray to God that you do nothing wrong—not that we may appear to pass the test, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear to fail. ⁸ For we can't do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ We rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. We also pray that you become fully mature. ¹⁰ This is why I am writing these things while absent, so that when I am there I may not have to deal harshly with you, in keeping with the authority the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down. ¹¹ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Become mature, be encouraged, be of the same mind, be at peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send you greetings. ¹³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

EXAMINE

#1 | A godly leader is always emphasizing the Lordship of Jesus

1. 2 Corinthians 13:3–4 “...[Jesus] is not weak in dealing with you, but powerful among you. 4 For he was crucified in weakness, but he lives by the power of God...”
 - a. The job of every leader in the church is to point people to Jesus, which is also the constant work of the Holy Spirit. (John 16:14–15)
 - i. *A godly leader is passionate about seeing people devote themselves to Jesus, not acquiring followers for themselves.*
 - b. Part of this is emphasizing not just the grace, love and patience of Christ, but also His power, His authority, and His Judgement. (Colossians 1:15–20)
 - i. *People must really receive Him as their Master and Judge (2 Tim 4:1), as well as their loving Savior, or else they will have a warped and incomplete picture of Him.*
 - ii. *When leaders constantly emphasize the supremacy of Jesus, they are saying to their people “devote yourself to Him, not to me.” (1 Cor 1:13)*

#2 | A godly leader teaches people to evaluate themselves

1. 2 Corinthians 13:5–7 “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test. 6 And I hope you will recognize that we ourselves do not fail the test. 7 But we pray to God that you do nothing wrong—not that we may appear to pass the test, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear to fail.”

- a. In verse 7 Paul is saying, “I would rather look like we failed in our responsibility to correct you, because you repented before we had the chance, than for you to need us to correct you.”
- b. One of the most important steps of maturity is the ability to “parent yourself” and self-evaluation is a major part of that. (Hebrews 5:13-14; 1 Cor 11:31)
 - i. *Like a good parent, Paul is hoping to work himself out of a job – not because the Corinthians were a burden to him, but because he wanted to see them reach maturity, even if that meant they needed him less.*

#3 | A godly leader seeks to make people mature, not dependent

- 1. 2 Corinthians 13:9 “We rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. We also pray that you become fully mature.”
 - a. Notice that Paul’s whole ministry team had the same heart – they were willing to suffer and sacrifice if it would benefit and mature others.
 - i. Notice the strong language – they didn’t just accept this, they “rejoiced” when it happened.
 - b. Any leader that tries to keep people dependent on themselves is immature and dangerous.
 - i. *They aren’t serving others, they are just using people to satisfy their own needs and ambitions.*
 - c. A true leader leads people to maturity – able to function without the constant attention of the leader.

- i. *Leading people to the point where they don't need you hovering over them means that you did your job – you should be happy about that, not sad that they no longer need you the way they once did.*

REFLECT

Let's take a moment to pray

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide our attention and lead our conversation, helping us see and understand what He wants us to apply in our lives.

APPLY

Process the passage together with these questions:

- What specific evidences should we look for when we "test ourselves" to see if we are in the faith?
- Why is the ability to self-evaluate and correct your own behavior a necessary step toward spiritual maturity?
- What does it mean practically to rejoice when we are weak, but those we lead are strong?

Where we want to "land the plane"

- Godly leadership is defined not by how many followers one accumulates, but by how well a leader fosters devotion to Jesus. A leader must move away from creating dependency and instead focus on equipping others to examine their own faith and grow into spiritual adulthood. By rejoicing when others become strong and mature, we reflect the heart of Jesus, who used authority to build others up into maturity. The ultimate goal is for

every believer to stand firm in their faith, fully mature and capable of following the Lord without constant supervision.

Exhortation for the Week

- Take personal responsibility for your spiritual growth and your devotion to Jesus.

FOOTNOTES

1. **Paul's Third Visit.** Paul's second visit to Corinth (2:1) had been a humbling experience (12:21), not only because of the offense against him (cf. 2:5–11) but because many in the church were living contrary to the will of God (12:21). Paul had warned them about the consequences of sin then and he did so again in this letter. Following Jesus' application of Deuteronomy 19:15 to errant brethren (Matt. 18:16), Paul promised discipline for the unrepentant. The proof of his apostolic authority which they wanted would be given but in terms they would be wise to avoid (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5). Though Paul was weak, Christ whom he served was not (cf. 2 Cor. 10:4). *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), 584.*
2. **"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith."** Throughout the letter Paul subjected himself and his ministry to scrutiny. Now he handed the lens to the Corinthians, with the challenge that they consider their own conduct (yourselves is in the emphatic position in Gr.). Paul's question is usually construed with regard to positional justification: were they Christians or not? But it more likely concerned practical sanctification: did they demonstrate that they were in the faith (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13) and that Christ was

in them by their obeying His will? To stand the test was to do what was right. To fail was to be disobedient and therefore subject to God's discipline. The words fail(ed) the test (2 Cor. 13:5–6) and failed (v. 7) render the Greek word *adokimoi* ("disapproved"; cf. *adokimos* in 1 Cor. 9:27).

Whatever doubts the Corinthians may have had about Paul's conduct (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:17, 2:17, 7:2) he believed that a sober evaluation would lead them to vindicate him. He hoped they would not be disapproved by God; and he hoped they would see that he was not disapproved by God. Still it was their reputation or standing, not his, that concerned him. *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), 584–585.*

3. **The Holy Kiss.** The holy kiss (cf. 2 Cor. 13:12; Rom. 16:16; 1 Thes. 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14) was primarily a symbolic expression of the love, forgiveness, and unity which should exist among Christians. As such, it became associated with the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a prelude to its observance (cf. Justin Apology 1. 65. 2). It was a mark of the familial bond which united believers. There is no indication that it was restricted to one's own sex in the New Testament era (cf. Luke 7:37, 45). The suggestion to separate the sexes for the exchange of the kiss arose in the late second century due to concern about criticism from non-Christians and the danger of erotic abuse (cf. Athenagorus Supplication 32; Clement of Alexandria Pedagogue 3. 81. 2–4). By the third century it seems that the sexes were separated (Apostolic Constitutions 2. 57. 17), and by the fourth century the clergy and laity were also kept apart (Apostolic Constitutions 8. 11. 9). Such, however, was apparently not the case in the New Testament church where love for one another was openly expressed. *David K. Lowery, "1 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), 548.