

## **The Missionary's Witness**

**October 18, 2020**

**Text: 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1**

### **Sermon Summary**

This message looks at Paul's deep concerns for the people of the Corinthian Church and the extreme importance of their witness to the culture around them! From the text we derive 7 steps needed to shore up the witness of the followers of Christ because they were supposed to be on mission for God! We too are to be witnesses of the good news of Christ and we must take the same steps if we are to reach our world with the Good News of salvation through Jesus and His sacrifice on the cross! Each step is based on this premise: "As followers of Jesus we should have a good witness to the world by putting God's glory and the good of others ahead of our own desires!"

### **Full Sermon Notes**

"Praise the Father, Praise the Son, Praise the Spirit, Three in One!! God of glory, Majesty Praise forever to the King of Kings!" What a blessing and honor it is to be given the privilege of worshiping and serving such an awesome God! And what an awesome privilege and responsibility it is to be asked to be His ambassadors, His representatives, His witnesses to the world! Today we're going to examine the importance of our witness to the world! Let's pray and ask God to teach us truths today that will have great practical application to our lives.

Pray!

Okay, let's begin by defining the word witness.

Witness - a person who sees an event, typically a crime or accident, take place.

Used to refer to confirmation or evidence given by signature, under oath, or otherwise.

Open profession of one's religious faith through words or actions.

It's this last one we will be dealing with today! This coming week, your readings in our Foundations reading plan, will focus mainly on the book of 1 Corinthians. This first letter from Paul to the people of the Church at Corinth deals mainly with the conduct of followers of Christ. Why? Because Corinth was a wealthy trading center and had a well earned reputation throughout the Roman world as being a very wicked city! Sound like any big city we might be close to? You can imagine the people in the church there struggled with the temptations and constant pull of the world around them. And when they succumbed to the temptations, it had a dramatic effect on their witness as followers of Christ. Paul had heard about the problems so he wrote them a pretty long letter to address these issues. Three weeks ago I preached a sermon on the guidelines for the mission of the church and I mentioned the fact that people are watching us and how we live our lives as they consider the message of our mission, which Zach skillfully shared with us is that faith in the work of Jesus on the Cross is the only way for people to be saved! Last week Andrew shared a powerful message on the wonderful expectation of

our mission which is the return of Jesus our King and spending our eternity with Him! Today I hope for you to take home this message:

“As followers of Jesus we should have a good witness to the world by putting God’s glory and the good of others ahead of our own desires!”

For this to happen you must understand that a follower of Jesus is by default a missionary for Jesus! Jesus commanded this to be so in the great commission He gave to His followers...:

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matthew 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

So if you are a follower of Jesus then you are a missionary and that means your witness to the world is of critical importance to the mission of the church! I want to read to you our text for today which will guide our message as we look at the missionary’s witness! Paul states the following in 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1..

1 Corinthians 10:23 “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive.

1 Corinthians 10:24 No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

1 Corinthians 10:25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,

1 Corinthians 10:26 for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.”

1 Corinthians 10:27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

1 Corinthians 10:28 But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifice,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience.

1 Corinthians 10:29 I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience?

1 Corinthians 10:30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—

1 Corinthians 10:33 even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Paul is telling us that a follower of Jesus should have a good witness to the world by putting God's glory and the good of others ahead of their own desires! What are the steps for developing a good witness to the world for God's glory and the good of others? That's a very good question and I discovered seven steps in this text. The first step is to...

### **Step #1 - Understand that just because you can doesn't mean you should!**

1 Corinthians 10:23 "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive.

Here's what was happening: People were taking the teachings about our freedom in Christ and the fact that a follower of Christ is not under the letter of the law anymore, but under grace, and they were saying that meant a person no longer had to worry about their behavior. They were thinking because they were under Grace and not the law that they could just keep on living in sin, doing bad and wicked things, and it wouldn't matter! Paul was like, you're out of your mind and said this...

A. Just because you have the right to do something does not mean that it will be beneficial!

Good morning Kids! So glad you could join us this morning! The word beneficial means when something benefits you or is good for you. Paul is saying some things we do are not good for us. It's not illegal or against the law to jump off the top of a swimming pool slide into the shallow end of the pool, but that may not be beneficial for you, you could break your neck! And kids, even if you've done that before and didn't break your neck, if your parents find out you've been doing that, that may not be beneficial for you either. If they find out, it may not be your neck you need to be worried about!

Even after Paul points out the fact that just because you have the right to do something it might not be beneficial, the people repeat, "But I have the right to do anything!" To which Paul replies...

B. Just because you have the right to do something does not mean it will be constructive!

In other words, we need to ask if what we are doing is constructive? Is it helpful? Does it encourage and build others up or does it tear them down? This really has application here in the good ole USA, where freedom of speech is one of our founding principles! It's one of five freedoms protected in our First Amendment: Freedom of Religion, Freedom of Speech, Freedom of the Press, Freedom to Assemble and Freedom to Petition the Government.

But just because we have freedom of speech does not mean things we have the right to say will be constructive and helpful for us, for others, or for advancing the mission of the Church! The writer of Proverbs put it this way...

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:4 The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.

If you insist on doing or saying something just because you have the right and don't consider whether it's beneficial or constructive, that says something about your character and your spiritual condition! Here's the problem with this "But I have the right" attitude: it makes it all about me, myself and I! Paul has something to say about this kind of attitude when he gives us the second step to developing a good witness to the world for God's glory and the good of others...

## **Step #2 - Stop being selfish and start caring for others!**

Paul says it plainly...

1 Corinthians 10:24 No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

Let me share a secret in life I've found. When I seek my own good, it rarely if ever turns out good, but when I seek the good of others, God honors that by taking care of me! But it's not always easy to put others ahead of yourself, is it? We want our way, and many times when we don't get our way, we get upset and whine about things and sometimes go beyond whining! Hey kids do you ever find yourself saying, "but that's just not fair" when you think someone else got more than you? Adults deal with this attitude sometimes too! Paul was dealing with a church in Corinth filled with people who were constantly fighting with each other, debating everything, choosing sides and forming cliques around different leaders, and even trying to outdo one another in the spiritual gifts department. Isn't it ironic, that people claiming to be filled with The Holy Spirit, were acting like this? Isn't it sad that people were thinking they were more spiritual than someone else because of a spiritual gift God had given them? God had given them spiritual gifts to help them carry out their mission of reaching the world with the good news of Jesus and making disciples, but somehow they even turned that into a prideful competition. There's quite a bit of corrective language in Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church and he corrects them with these words in chapter 12...

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed....

1 Corinthians 12:4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.

1 Corinthians 12:5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

1 Corinthians 12:6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

1 Corinthians 12:7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Paul then gives a list of some pretty amazing spiritual gifts and positions in the church, like apostles, prophets, workers of miracles, teachers, administrators, but then totally surprises everyone by saying this...

1 Corinthians 12:31 Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

Their whole mindset just got blown away! Wait, those are the top leadership positions, when it comes to the mission, what could possibly be greater than those things?

1 Corinthians 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 Corinthians 13:2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

1 Corinthians 13:5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

1 Corinthians 13:6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

The third step to develop a good witness to the world for God's glory and the good of others is to...

### **Step #3 - If it's not a thing don't make it a thing (Use the common sense God gave you!)**

1 Corinthians 10:25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,

1 Corinthians 10:26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

1 Corinthians 10:27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

Paul is not saying that we should compromise our convictions, but he is saying that we should not be legalistic in our interactions with a lost person. Some people seem more interested in showing off their righteousness to others rather than being a witness to others. Since we don't have the issue in our culture of meat having been sacrificed to an idol, let me give you some

culturally relevant examples. Here's one: You go over to eat at someone's house and they serve bread pudding with a sauce made with Rum or Bourbon, and you immediately say: "Did you cook all the alcohol off that, 'cause I don't drink and if you didn't I ain't eating that!" Now, if they offer you a cold one, it would not be impolite to say "thanks, I don't drink, but a glass of that sweet tea would be good for me, thank you!" Another example would be when somebody says a cuss word, and you immediately say "don't talk like that around me, I'm a Christian!" The chances of you being able to witness to them after that is slim to none. I once worked with a construction company roofing houses. Some of those guys took free speech to the extreme. I didn't say anything, I just tried to live my life and talk in a way they could see and hear the difference. I built some friendships with several of the guys and they discovered my other job was traveling and doing Christian Rock concerts. It wasn't long after that they began to clean up their language around me. I had never corrected them once. Then one day one of the guys who just didn't care, started with the language and the other guys all of a sudden jumped in there and said, "come on, show a little respect bro, and tone the language down!"

One other example: If you go over to eat dinner with someone and they have secular music playing and you immediately say, "Uh, could you please put that on lifesongs or k-love 'cause I don't listen to that kind of music." It would be much better to build a relationship with that person and when the time is right, introduce them to some of the music you listen to. But that won't be effective if you've already made them feel their music is worthless. Maybe we should remember this bit of wisdom from Jesus Himself...

Matthew 10:16 "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.

In other words, use a little common sense in your witness to others.

The fourth step to develop a good witness to the world for God's glory and the good of others is to...

#### **Step #4 - Remember that your witness is more important than your rights!**

1 Corinthians 10:28 But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience.

1 Corinthians 10:29 I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience?

1 Corinthians 10:30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?

In other words, Paul is saying, I have the right to eat this without feeling guilty, but my witness to others means more to me than my rights! Paul explained this extremely well in chapter 8. Listen...

1 Corinthians 8:1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.

1 Corinthians 8:2 Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know.

1 Corinthians 8:3 But whoever loves God is known by God.

1 Corinthians 8:4 So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “There is no God but one.”

1 Corinthians 8:5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”),

1 Corinthians 8:6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

1 Corinthians 8:7 But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

1 Corinthians 8:8 But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

1 Corinthians 8:9 Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

1 Corinthians 8:10 For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol’s temple, won’t that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols?

1 Corinthians 8:11 So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.

1 Corinthians 8:12 When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:13 Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.

Paul is telling us to have a conscience! Having a conscience is being conscious of what you do, what you say, and how your attitudes and beliefs affect what you do, and what you say! If we will ask Him and let Him, the Holy Spirit will guide our conscience and speak to our hearts about our actions and our words! This has some very practical implications for us in the 2020 Corona Virus world in which we live, but I’ll let the Holy Spirit share those things with you, and you can take up any issues you have about what He says, with Him!! But I will say this, actually I’ll let Jesus say it...

John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”  
The fifth step to develop a good witness to the world for God’s glory and the good of others is to...

## **Step #5 Do everything you do for the glory of God!**

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Folks, this gets to the heart of the missionary and their witness! What motivates you to be on mission for Christ in the first place? What is the passion of your life? Whose glory are you more concerned with, your's or God's?

Evidently some folks had gotten involved in the church at Corinth for the wrong reasons. Back in Chapter 4 Paul had talked about some of the people who had become arrogant! They had come to a place where they thought they had arrived and were acting like kings! Paul says when the Lord comes...

1 Corinthians 4:5 ...He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

He goes on to say...

1 Corinthians 4:7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Paul was heart broken and shocked that some of the people no longer had a passion for the Glory of God or the mission of the church to reach their lost culture but had decided to join in the wickedness of the culture. Chapter five deals with a very specific example of this with an individual who may have even been in leadership and who had become involved in gross immorality with no remorse and the church leadership had just turned a blind eye to this. What a terrible witness to the world!! Paul said this kind of behavior was to be expected in the world, but not in the church. Now let me make this clear. Paul was not saying people in the church are perfect! We are not, but there is a difference between someone who comes to church knowing they are struggling with sin and are wanting God's help to do better, and the person who comes to church knowing they are in sin, but don't want to change, don't care who it affects or influences, and who could care less about the Glory of God! That's hypocrisy! I've had people tell me before they didn't come to church because they were struggling with something and didn't want to be hypocrites. Folks if you're struggling and want to do better and realize you need God's help to get better, that's not hypocrisy, that's humility and will result in repentance and will bring great glory to God. People who have struggled with sin and found forgiveness and freedom in Christ make great witnesses and bring great glory to God because they showcase His mercy, His grace, His love, and His power to transform lives! In fact Paul would later write a second letter to the Corinthian church and say this...

2 Corinthians 7:10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...

The sixth step to develop a good witness to the world for God's glory and the good of others is to...



## **Step #6 Realize you are a missionary on a life or death mission**

1 Corinthians 10:32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—

1 Corinthians 10:33 even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Paul had previously stated this in greater detail in Chapter 9.

1 Corinthians 9:19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

1 Corinthians 9:20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.

In other words, if Paul had flaunted his freedom from the law and blatantly ignored some of the Jewish laws and traditions when he was in a Jewish community, he would not even get to first base with his witness and attempt to share Jesus with them! Paul knew he was saved by grace and not the law, and was therefore not under the harsh requirements of the law, but he also knew they wouldn't understand unless he explained things to them and for that to happen, he had to first be given the opportunity to at least speak to them. Paul continues...

1 Corinthians 9:21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

1 Corinthians 9:22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

1 Corinthians 9:23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Paul was not saying he threw out his Godly principles when he was with the Gentiles, but he didn't harp on the letter of the law with these unbelievers, because they would have just laughed at him and would not have taken him seriously! Once Paul built a relationship with them he began to share some of the important principles of Christ with them!

When we realize the critical nature of our mission, it should cause us to want to be the most effective witnesses for Jesus possible.

Someone cared enough to share the gospel with you, and we are here today because of missionaries who have been faithful disciples of Christ with a powerful witness!

The seventh step to develop a good witness to the world for God's glory and the good of others is to...

## **Step #7 Recognize the fact that someone is going to follow your example, good or bad!**

Paul realized this and so he made this statement...

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Wouldn't it be great if we could all have such a witness. Paul says follow my example as I follow the example of Christ! Can you say that? Can I say that? Can any of us say that?

Hey kids, even as young as you are you probably have a friend or a younger brother or sister who is watching how you live your life! And if you do something wrong or dangerous someone else may just follow you and they may get hurt! And I want to encourage you not to follow someone just because they're older or you think they're cool, or have nice things, or they're popular. Pay close attention to who you follow and pay close attention to how you lead!

I want to close by sharing a personal conviction I have about my own witness as your pastor. I preach a high standard, I preach Jesus! Because of that, I'll never be able to fully live what I preach, but the day I quit trying to live what I preach, is the day I'll quit preaching! Because that would be hypocritical in the worst sense of the word!! My concern for my witness is not that you think I'm some kind of great and awesome person for my glory! No it's that you realize I'm a sinner saved by God's amazing grace and that grace has changed my life and as a result I seek to live to bring glory to God and one of the greatest ways I could bring glory and joy to God would be to be such a good witness to you that you would want to meet the Jesus you see in my life and find eternal salvation!

Let's pray!