

Imperfect Church; Perfect Saviour: How Shall We Then Live?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 October 2024

Preacher: David Parker

[0 : 00] If someone could see a video of our day-to-day Christianity, would they see people whose values and way of life were different from the values and way of life of our contemporary culture?

Is it possible that we can drift into thinking we're saved by grace? Is that not all we need to bother about?

And with this outlook, if we have this outlook, we cheapen grace by living a crossless Christianity. Listen here to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was executed by the Nazis at the end of the war.

One of his first books was written in the 1930s when it was during the time of the rise of Hitler and during the time of that horrible situation that was going on there.

[1 : 20] And in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, one of the first books that he ever wrote, it opens with these words, We are fighting today for costly grace.

We are fighting today for costly grace. Paul is facing essentially a similar problem with this church, this group of Christians.

Can you believe it? One of the earliest Christian churches, and it's riddled and shot through with all the problems that we've just been articulating.

What hope is there for us? Paul is facing this problem.

Whether it was the factions that were threatening to tear the church apart, the toleration of sexual mores of the surrounding culture, or in this chapter taking fellow believers to secular courts to win a case against them, they were in danger, were they not, of living like the world around them, aping its morals and values.

[2 : 41] And it also meant, did it not, that they were rejecting a costly Christ-centered Christianity.

Could that be true of me? Could it be true of you? Could it be true today of Christians or some Christians in Scotland?

Could it be true of you?

Could it be true of you?

They might get brownie points in front of their peers? I want to look at this passage under three headings this evening.

[4 : 24] Firstly, Paul's critique of Corinthian Christianity. Secondly, Paul's warning to Corinthian professing Christians.

And thirdly, a reminder to the Corinthian Christians of what their conversion entailed and what it means to be a Christian.

Firstly, Paul's critique of these practices that are unchristian, that are marrying the Christian church in Corinth.

Now, you'll notice when you're in the Bible. Now, you'll notice when we read this passage, the word dare came into it. But in fact, in the original language, the word dare is the very first word in the sentence.

If you like, it's in bold capitals. And Paul is utterly horrified at this practice that's going on among some Christians in the Church of Scotland.

[5 : 40] And you can imagine the intensity that he feels. And he's put this word. I want you to notice, but we'll note them as we go through.

I want you to notice some literary devices that Paul uses to emphasize his points in this chapter. And I want you also to notice as we go through this, how Paul uses theology or biblical truths to address this issue.

So, Paul begins this by saying, Dare any of you, having a trivial matter against the family of God, against brothers and sisters, against the body of Christ, dare any of you, go to the unrighteous and the unbelievers?

That's the tone and the mood that I want you to catch from this statement here of Paul's. And then he goes into two arguments, what you might call theological arguments, arguing from the greater to the lesser.

Look there at verse 2. Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And then in verse 3, Do you not know that we are to judge angels?

[7 : 06] And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? And how much more if you're going to judge the angels?

Matters pertaining to, judging matters pertaining to this life. So, Paul is using theology here to come against this practice that they're engaging in.

He's saying to you, don't you know the dignity? Don't you know the, what the people of God, the kind of future that they have? They're going to be sitting on the thrones, on thrones with Christ. And we read about this in Matthew and in Luke and in Revelation. Judging the world. And yet you're taking such trivial matters.

And therefore he says, in the light of that, so if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church?

[8 : 16] Meaning unbelievers. Meaning non-Christians. And these secular... And these secular... Because Petronius also tells us that the judges themselves were open to bribery.

And they charged money. And it was like an auction, says Petronius. That the highest bidder, that was the person that got the case stated in their favour.

And I'm sure that Paul would have been aware of this. I'm sure he would have been. And no wonder he's absolutely livid about it.

Have you got the audacity he's saying? Have you got the bravado to go to unbelievers and the unrighteous instead of settling these disputes within the church?

In verse 5, Paul says, Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?

[9 : 37] I smiled when I read that. And I thought, wow, well done, Paul. Paul is engaging in a bit of irony here in what I might call gentle mockery.

You guys that are big heads about your wisdom. And yet, the implication of you going out to these judges and magistrates that are unbelievers, the implication surely is that you don't think any of you are bright enough to settle a dispute.

One thing that you see as you go through these verses with Paul is he's pretty smart and his brain is in the right place.

And then he says this in verse 7, They were trying to win.

And that's what the whole point of the lawsuits were. That they could win. They would win the case. It would be won for them. Paul is saying, well, I'm afraid you've got it all wrong.

[11 : 00] The very fact that you're behaving in this way, that you're behaving like the contemporary culture around you, just as you were with that sexual deviancy that I mentioned, just as you were with the factional things that were happening in the church.

That's what you're doing. You're descending into a kind of worldly Christianity. Another thing that is interesting, I mentioned about some literary devices.

Paul uses a conjunction to emphasize something by placing the conjunction in front of what it is he wants to emphasize.

So, for example, in verse 6, he says, But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers.

See, he has just said, he's using this conjunction as a contrast between his first part of what he's saying, which is, Can it be that there's no one wise enough to settle a dispute?

[12 : 27] But, he says, and he emphasizes that, brother goes to law against brother. This is what he wants to get through to them. You're going against your fellow brother, your fellow sister, your fellow believer, and you're wronging them, and you're dragging them before unbelievers.

What wisdom is in that? And then, in verse 7, he says this, and I'm sure myself, I don't know what you think, see what you think when you hear it, at this point, in his onslaught against them, in his confrontation against this issue, going to unbelieving judges, and taking believers, fellow believers,

to try and win a case against them, he says to them, why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be dethroned? Now, I have a friend who's in Spain, he's been a friend of mine for a long time, decades, and I remember, many, many years ago, we were discussing the Sermon on the Mount, and I remember we got to that bit in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said, but I say to you, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that hate you, and Arthur looked at me, he's a classics teacher, he says, that's the supernatural level of Christianity, that's costly Christianity, Paul is confronting them with authentic, Christ-centered, costly Christianity, did Jesus suffer wrong? Was Jesus deprived? Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? And that word defrauded can also be translated deprived.

[15 : 15] Think of Christ, who deprived himself of that state, if you like, of looking into the Father, of enjoying uninterrupted, one might say, profound fellowship, and yet he deprives himself by donning a human nature, a human person.

he deprives himself by allowing people to wrong him, to spit on him, to abuse his body with great instruments of torture.

Paul concludes his unmasking of their Christless Christianity, if you like, by saying to them in verse 8, but you yourselves wrong and defraud and he adds even your own brothers.

And that brings me to my second point, which is the warning. Now, I deliberately took a lot longer than that first point because I wanted to go through the kind of arguments that Paul is using to confront this situation.

but when we get to the warning, and that happens in verse 9, it's quite a warning.

[17 : 27] He has just said in verse 8, but you yourselves wrong and defraud. And he gets to verse 9 and he says, do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?

And he says this right on the back of telling them that they are wrongdoers at this moment in time in what they're doing. And notice what he says next.

Do not be deceived. We are fighting today, says Bonhoeffer, for costly grace. do not be deceived, says Paul.

And then he lists that list again. And within that list is thieving greed, and swindling, exactly what these people are up to.

Paul is saying, I'll tell you what's at stake with the kind of behavior that you're involved in, the authenticity of your Christianity.

[19 : 23] Be assured, says Paul, the unrighteous is an umbrella term which covers all wrong, whatever that wrong is.

You may not be saying, have a valid claim for entry into the kingdom of God if this kind of behavior is going to normalize and characterize your entire life. What about you and I?

Is it possible that psychologically we can divorce justification and sanctification?

justification. I want to suggest to you that justification which is the darling of reformed theology because it tells us that rightly through the work of Christ on the cross God has declared all who put their trust and faith in that work righteous.

[21 : 12] That is having the righteousness of Christ. But I want to suggest to you that justification and sanctification are two sides of the same coin.

They may well be logically distinct but they're dynamically related and we'll see that later I think perhaps better in my third point.

Calvin felt that one of the great truths that captures all of these things like justification and sanctification and union with Christ and the body of Christ and so forth was this doctrine of the union of the believer with Jesus Christ that almost you might say mystical union Jesus also said you can tell a tree by its fruit in other words Jesus is saying to people if you have the root of the matter in you there necessarily will be fruit things Paul later on in one of his other letters warns people about receiving the grace of

God in vain what God has joined together let not man put asunder don't be deceived Bonhoeffer went on to say cheap grace is holding the doctrine only intellectually we are fighting today for costly grace the grace that the new testament knows is living grace fruitful grace powerful grace grace is not only a charming sound but a mighty power grace grace finally as we close

Paul has confronted this behavior he has delivered a warning to them and he now wants to remind them of what is entailed in being a real Christian in verse 11 he's been mentioning just before that verse that none of those people who are continuing in a life of wrong will enter the kingdom of God I don't believe by the way that he's talking about people who are struggling a real Christian with something or that they repeatedly have to confess for the same sense I don't think that's what he's talking about that non

[25 : 11] Christian culture and any embracing of it and if it becomes normalized but anyway after he has listed all these things under the umbrella of unrighteousness if you like he says such were some of you and it's interesting see when he says there such were some of you the language that he uses in the verb if I could just say that I don't like using technical any technical stuff but the language that he uses in the verb indicates that the people that he's referring to were repeatedly and continuously living like that but then he goes on to say but you were sanctified sorry you were washed you were sanctified you were justified now you see how at the beginning of a living you've got that word and sorry at the middle of the sentence of a living you've got the word but you were washed if I could put it this way to you that word but is used three times in the original language again for emphasis so here's what Paul is saying the way that he wrote it but you were washed but you were sanctified but you were justified in the name of the

Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God what's he referring to now the Greek word for baptize is the easiest in the world baptizo but this is not the word that Paul is using when we have this translation of washed wash me in the blood of the lamb and I shall be whiter than the snow he's saying look you offered yourself to be washed of your former life of your former sins didn't you that's what he's saying to them he's reminding them that this is what they did and he says you were sanctified now that word sanctified has two distinct meanings and it's the same word is used at one point with one of those meanings and at another point with another of those meanings and one of the meanings is to set apart and he said you allowed yourselves to be set apart if you like this is my language to be an alternative society with alternative values and morals and direction and priorities in life you allowed yourself to be set apart to follow

Christ and to be like him the other meaning is it's a process and he says you were justified now that's interesting the actual word in the Greek means just and righteous and why is that interesting because he's been using that word with the negative in front of it a decale decale adicale putting the a in front of the word gives it a negative just like if you ask what's the technical name for a believer in

God a theist what is the name then for people that don't believe God a theist and my point here is that Paul has been using this word the very word pointing to their unrighteous behavior and he's reminding them you signed up to being righteous finally notice how he puts it in in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God and that applies I believe to every one of these clauses you you were washed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ you were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ you were justified in the name of the

Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of God in another place not part of this sermon really there's another place it says nobody who doesn't have the spirit of God is a Christian Paul is saying make up your mind are you still of that mind or not are we losing our grip on costly grace Christ like Christianity could we be failing to allow the light of Christ to shine like a candle in the dark of our culture and our society if you remember nothing about this sermon I would ask you to remember [31 : 57] Bonhoeffer's phrase we're fighting today because I think it is very useful today for costly grace amen may the Lord bless these thoughts to each give us for his glory and for our eternal good God T you