

'Imitating Paul's Cruciform Life'

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] Well, I thought I'd start today with a bit of a clapping test. You know, the ones that teachers do at school to try and get students' attention.

You know, I clap a pattern and then you imitate it. So this is a congregational participation moment. Are you ready? Amelia's rolling up her sleeves. Oh, no, you're putting your sleeves down.

Okay, roll them up, get them ready. Ready? We'll start with an easy one. Here we go. Oh, okay, let me try this right. Hey, well done. What about this one?

Beautiful. And you've just proved that you can all imitate someone. Because people are good imitators, aren't they?

And in fact, there's a whole industry online called influencers who want to influence people to imitate them. Well, in our passage today, Paul is the original, the OG influencer, who encourages the Corinthians and us to imitate him.

[1:06] And we see it plainly in verse 16 of our passage. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me. Now that might sound pretty arrogant of Paul to say something like that.

But as we'll see, Paul only says it because he imitates Christ who was crucified for him. In other words, Paul seeks to live a cruciform.

The word cruciform just means cross-shaped life. One of humble and sacrificial service to others and even a willingness to suffer for Jesus.

Whereas it's the Corinthians, as we'll see, who have a problem with arrogance and pride and being puffed up. Like when it comes to church leaders. And so they're to imitate firstly Paul's view of leaders.

Point one. This is going to be our longest point. But kick off in verse one. He says, this then is how you ought to regard us leaders as servants of Christ.

[2:09] And as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. We're to review church leaders as servants. Those entrusted with the gospel and given a job to do.

And here Paul picks up what we saw last week. If you were here last week in chapter three, he says, what is Apollos and what is Paul? Well, only servants who have been assigned a task by the Lord Jesus.

And he needs to tell the Corinthians this because they don't view church leaders as servants.

Rather, they view them as people they can follow to make themselves look and sound impressive.

Remember, they were boasting because they followed a certain leader who they claim was better.

And so that made them spiritually superior. We saw this last week in chapter three, verse 21, where he says, therefore, no more boasting about human leaders.

And we see it this week in verse six of our passage, where he says, then you will not be puffed up, literally arrogant in being a follower of one of us leaders over against the other.

[3:14] You know, it's kind of like kids who say, well, I go to Borwyn High. Is that a good school? I don't know. Or I go to Tint, whatever it is. They kind of say which school they go to to make themselves sound superior.

Only here, the Corinthians doing it with church leaders. In fact, one of my daughters was at a party last night from someone from Donvale Christian College. And apparently there was a few pastors kids there because she heard some people saying, some kids saying, well, my dad's a pastor of this church.

And my dad's a pastor in this church. And she almost said, well, my dad's the senior pastor of our church. But she didn't because that would have been Corinthian.

That's what they were doing. But that's to put certain leaders up on a pedestal to make you look better. Sometimes I hear it with people who say, I listen to this online preacher and not that one.

It's not a cross shaped view of leaders that sees them as servants. Of course, as servants of Christ, they must prove faithful to the job they've been given by Christ.

[4:18] So he goes on in verse two. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. Faithful in both the gospel, teaching it, but also faithful in their job of leading whatever ministry they're leading.

And so by way of our first application, then if you are involved in some sort of leadership where you teach the Bible, whether it's kids church or a growth group or meeting one to one with someone else and certainly the staff, we need to make sure we do our very best to be faithful.

Not just teaching faithfully, but leading faithfully. Because there have been far too many leaders in the church who have not done that. Haven't there?

You know what I'm talking about. It's brought the name of the church and more importantly, the name of Christ into disrepute. For those who have been given a trust, we all must prove faithful. But as servants of Christ, our leaders will ultimately be judged by Christ. Verse three to five. I care very little if I'm judged by you or any human court. Indeed, I do not even judge myself.

[5:26] My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord Jesus who judges me. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time.

Wait until the Lord Jesus returns. He will bring to light what is hidden in the darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time, each will receive their praise from God.

Now the appointed time he mentions here is judgment day. When Christ returns. And the judgment he's actually talking about here is in terms of reward or not for faithfulness.

That's why at the end of verse five, he talks about then they'll receive their praise from God. You know, like that well done, good and faithful servant mentioned last week. Or more importantly, Jesus mentions.

But on that judgment day, there'll be both types of judgment. First, Jesus will put this world right by holding everyone accountable. And that means people paying for all their sins.

[6:25] But for those who believe in Jesus, like most of us, his death pays for all our sins. So that we could be saved from eternal death in hell to enjoy eternal life first in heaven and then the new creation.

That's the big judgment. And that's why it's worth believing in Jesus if you don't yet believe. But there's also a smaller judgment for Christians in terms of reward for faithfulness, which as I said, includes that praise from God.

This is the kind that Paul is talking about here. Either way, though, it happens on judgment day. So he's talking about passing final judgment on someone like leaders.

That's what the Corinthians were doing. That's what the Corinthians were doing. Passing final judgment. That is writing off one leader in favor of another. Even though they didn't know all the facts, like verse five, the motives of the heart.

And so, for example, it would be like people at our church saying, oh, I love that new guy, James. He's the best preacher we have. In fact, the others should just give up and resign.

[7:40] You know, write them off. Now, I haven't heard anyone say that. I mentioned this story this morning. I did have some people at the door. Yes, he is the best preacher. Okay, sure. Now, he may be.

In the end, it doesn't matter. But no one knows all of his ministry or all of anyone else's ministry. And what's more, no one knows the motives of anyone's heart, do they?

And so we don't actually have all the facts to pass final judgment that's fair. But Jesus does. He knows the motives of all our hearts.

He sees all our deeds. And so he has all the facts and can pass a final judgment that is fair. You see, we're not to pass final judgment or write off any leader or any person for that matter.

Because we simply don't know all their deeds. Certainly not all their motives, nor even how God may work in their lives down the track. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time.

[8:44] Now, does this mean we should never judge? After all, verse five says judge nothing. I want to take a bit of time to just kind of unpack this because I think there is some confusion about judging.

And particularly because in our society, there is a push to judge literally nothing. For example, my brother-in-law is a teacher in Sweden. And at one stage, he was certainly told that he could not fail any students in his class.

Because that would be to judge them, which is not good for their mental health, right? Or if you're parents of teenagers, and if you say, oh, that's not right or that's wrong, sometimes the teenagers might respond, don't be so judgy.

Because that's the culture they're growing up with. Now, yes, Jesus said we're not to judge in terms of being firstly judgmental. You know, when you look down on others thinking you're so much better.

You know, trying to remove the speck of dust in someone's eye when you've got a log in your own eye, if you remember that parable from Jesus. And so we're not to be judgmental.

[9:49] And here, we're not to pass final judgment. That is, we're to judge nothing in terms of passing final judgment on someone. Because we don't have all the facts.

But we are to judge in other ways. Or if you like, discern in other ways. It depends on the context. Like next week, where we are to judge in terms of discerning what's right and wrong.

And so next week, there'll be some really bad behavior in the Corinthian church. And Paul will say, are you not to judge those inside? That is, judge what is right and wrong.

And not encourage the person to keep sinning as some of them were. But encourage them to stop sinning. Or the week after in chapter 6, he says, is it wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?

In other words, he expects people to discern how to resolve a dispute between Christians rather than taking it to the courts in Melbourne. Even when it comes to church leaders, we're to judge in terms of discerning what is godly and ungodly behavior.

[10:55] And whether the sermon matches God's word or not. I gave, sorry, in verse 4, we see this with Paul actually. So he says, my conscience is clear.

Now, that involves some sort of self-assessment, doesn't it? To be able to say his conscience is clear, he's had to kind of discern or look at his own self and go, yeah, actually, you know what, my conscience is clear. I think I've done the right thing.

It's just that he doesn't pass final judgment on himself. That does not make me innocent. There may be something he missed. And so in terms of final judgment, he leads it to Jesus. And so to give you an example, last week, I mentioned a minister I heard years ago who gave a dud sermon, but God still used it to save someone, if you were here and remember that.

And then someone later asked me, oh, was that right of you to judge that minister? And I kind of said, well, yes, in terms of discerning whether his sermon matched God's word or not.

We're to do that for everyone's sermons, because don't we want to make sure that what we're hearing is actually God's word more than the minister's word? Isn't God's word more important than the minister's word?

[12:05] And so we are to discern whether it's faithful to God's word or not. It's just that we're not to pass final judgment and write them off. And so the application here for us is not don't judge at all, but actually judge rightly.

We are to judge in terms of discerning what's faithful and unfaithful in leaders, what's right and wrong behavior in our own lives, for example, what's fair and just with disputes.

It's just that we're not to be judgmental thinking that we are better than others, nor pass final judgment on someone, anyone, because we don't have all the facts.

And Paul applies that last one to himself and Apollos now in verse six. He says, brothers and sisters, I've applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, do not go beyond what is written.

Then you will not be puffed up in following, being a follower of one of us over against the other. Remember from last week, the Corinthians said of Paul that his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak.

[13:13] In other words, he doesn't look good and his speech is of no account. In other words, he don't speak good. Whereas Apollos, we know he was an eloquent man. And so he seems to be an impressive preacher. And so they were passing final judgment on one of them over against the other.

Apollos better because of his letters. No, Apollos is better because of his preaching. And Paul is now saying, no, no, you're not to do that. You're not to pass final judgment. Not to protect himself from their judgments.

After all, he says in verse three, it's for your benefit. What benefit? Well, so that they might learn not to go beyond God's word. That's what that means by not going beyond what is written.

In the New Testament, often when they use that phrase, it is written, it refers to the Old Testament, God's word in the Old Testament, where they quote or paraphrase.

And Paul has been doing this in 1 Corinthians, like chapter one. Therefore, as it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

[14:18] That's a paraphrase from our first reading in the Old Testament today from Jeremiah. And this was for their benefit because God's word is good for us. It's good to boast in the Lord Jesus who died for us and gave us life eternal.

No one else has done that for us or can do that for us. Indeed, he is the one who gives us everything such that we cannot boast in anything.

Verse seven. He says, for who makes you different or special from anyone else? What did you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? Notice the repetition of the word receive. For everything we have is a gift from God through Jesus. We may have worked hard, yes, but it's God who has given us the abilities and the opportunities to achieve anything.

Whether it's our job, our home, our health, our family. And this is especially true when it comes to our Christian lives. Now with forgiveness and God's spirit, God's family, not to mention life eternal.

[15:27] I mean, did you earn any of those things? We haven't, have we? We've received them as gifts. And so we're not to boast nor find our worth in any of those things, but in the Lord Jesus who gives us all things.

And so by way of our next application, I wonder who or what you attempted to boast you attempted to boast in or find your worth in. For the Corinthians, they boasted and found their worth in following a particular leader.

For us, it's more likely having an impressive job or an impressive car or an impressive house or an impressive appearance or our kids, impressive kids or grandkids.

When really we should all boast and find our worth in the Lord Jesus Christ, who gives us all these things. Whether imitate Paul's cruciform or cross-shaped view of leaders as servants, rather than boasting in them or anything else.

I went to imitate Paul's cross-shaped way of life. Point to verse 8. He goes on to say, Already you have all you want. Already you've become rich. You've begun to reign and that without us.

[16:45] How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we might reign with you. I hear Paul mocks their high view of themselves. You see, the Corinthians were puffed up or arrogant, not just because they followed a particular leader, but because they thought they had achieved a particular status.

In the ancient world, it was the wise and super spiritual who were revered as rich and reigning like kings. For example, in the writings of Plutarch, he writes, The wise man is termed not only prudent and just and brave, but also an orator, a poet, a general, a rich man, and a king who reigns.

And so because the Corinthians thought they were wise and super spiritual, they thought they had achieved that kind of worldly status and they took pride in it.

But the problem was they'd misunderstood the nature of Christianity. It's not about getting glory now in this world, but getting glory later when Christ returns.

Sharing in his glory, actually. Which is why Paul says in verse 8, How I wish you really had begun to reign, because it would have meant that Jesus had really returned.

[18:02] The world was put right. They were enjoying his glory. But the point is the Christian life is not about pursuing a high worldly status to take pride in now.

No, no, it's living a cross-shaped life of humility that sacrificially serves others now. And is even willing to suffer for Christ now.

And so with some sarcasm, Paul contrasts his life with their apparent high status in life. He goes on to say, For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of a procession, like those condemned to die in the arena, the Colosseum.

We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are so strong. You are honored.

We are dishonored. For to this very hour we go hungry and thirsty. We're in rags. We're brutally treated. We are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless. [19:06] When we are persecuted, we endure it. When we are slanted, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world, right up to this moment.

Paul says, He and the apostles are like the most humble of society, the lowest of the low, full, weak, dishonored, the scum of the earth. Like those at the end of a procession being led into the Colosseum, who are usually the prisoners about to die at the hands of the gladiators.

And he suffers for Christ. Whether going hungry and thirsty or in rags and homeless or brutally treated. And yet he still serves, sacrificially, works hard with his hands.

When he's cursed, he blesses. When he's persecuted, he endures it. When he's slanted, he still speaks kindly. And this is just like Jesus, isn't it?

Especially as Jesus humbled himself to death on a cross. For at the cross, he wore less than rags. And he was brutally treated, wasn't he?

[20:14] But when he was persecuted and mocked, he endured it, didn't he? When he was cursed, he blessed saying, Father, forgive them.

I still find that extraordinary. And he died on a cross which was reserved, the death reserved for the scum of the earth. And he did it all for us.

Here is the ultimate act of humble, sacrificial service. And it's this cruciform or cross-shaped way of life that the Corinthians and we are to imitate, verse 14.

He goes on to say, I'm not writing this to shame you, but to warn you as my dear children. Even if you had 10,000 guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For in Christ Jesus, I became your father through the gospel.

Therefore, I urge you to imitate me. Kids are particularly great imitators, especially of their parents. I like this kid imitating his dad building.

[21:14] Or this kid imitating his dad sleeping. Or this kid imitating his father looking. In fact, I was told the other day, all my kids now have their license, which is a bit scary.

But I was told the other day that one of my kids drives just like me. I took it as a compliment. I think it was better as an insult. But anyway. Here, Paul says he's become their spiritual father when he led them to faith in Jesus.

And as their spiritual father, he wants them to imitate him. To live that kind of humble, sacrificial life that serves others. And even sometimes suffer for Christ.

Yes, it will look different. We're not going to be led into the Colosseum to be martyred. But there are people being martyred around the world. It's the principle of living that cross-shaped life.

And so he writes this not to shame them, but to warn them about pursuing a high worldly status to take pride in. But rather to imitate him. In fact, in verse 17, he sent Timothy to remind them of his cruciform or cross-shaped life.

[22:24] And so by way of application, what kind of life are we pursuing? A life that will give us a high worldly status to take pride in? Or a life that follows in Christ's footsteps.

That humbly and sacrificially serves others. And is even willing to suffer for Jesus. For as Jesus famously said, whoever would be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.

And so we're to imitate Paul's way of life who imitated Christ. And lastly, we're to imitate Paul's talk about Christ. Point three, verse 18. He goes on to say, Some of you have become arrogant as if I were not coming to you.

But I will come to you very soon if the Lord is willing. And then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power.

Here the arrogance continues. But this time, Paul, notice the first word in verse 18, singles out not all of them, but some of them. And so this arrogance here is not about, you know, boasting in church leaders or having a high worldly status, which was most of the church.

[23:42] This seems to be some of them being arrogant in the way they were talking, verse 19. It's hard to know exactly what they were saying. But certainly they were talking like Paul wasn't returning to visit.

You know, kind of like kids, you know, talking a big game because they think their parents will never hear about it. Well, it seems like these are talking a big game because they think Paul will never

come and hear about it.

But secondly, and more importantly, verse 19, Paul seems to think their talk lacked power.

Especially because verse 20, he adds that the kingdom of God, both entering God's kingdom and living as a Christian in God's kingdom, are not a matter of talk, but of power.

And so what power? Well, it's the message of Christ crucified for us. That's what he's been saying is the power of God ever since chapter one, verse 18.

And it's this bit that looks foolish and weak to our world. And so it would have been this bit that the Corinthians would have ignored. But it really is this message that's God's power to save souls and change lives.

[24 : 54] I mean, what most powerfully motivates you to forgive others? Isn't it knowing that at the cross, God has forgiven you?

What most powerfully motivates you to live for Jesus? Isn't it knowing that at the cross, Jesus died for you? I mean, the fact that Jesus instituted a sacrament for us to remember something about him, he could have chose his resurrection, he could have chose his teaching, all these other things. And that's why, when he did not know that at the cross, he could have chosen his death. But the talk of some in Corinth seemed to lack any talk of Christ crucified, which was God's power.

While Paul's talk was cruciform or cross-shaped, because he kept talking about Christ crucified. Not just to save souls, but to change lives.

And so by way of final application, does our talk include Christ crucified? You know, for example, when we talk to God in prayer, do we thank God that Jesus died for us regularly?

[26 : 03] Or do we just pray about our earthly concerns, our family, work, finances, health? Pray about those things by all means. But make sure our talk in prayer still reflects Christ crucified for us.

And when we talk to others inside the church, do we encourage each other to keep following Christ crucified? Perhaps by sharing how God has been encouraging us to follow Jesus? Or perhaps by offering to pray for others who are struggling to follow Jesus?

Or do we just talk about the weekend? Or with those outside the church, when opportunity comes, and it doesn't come all the time, but when it does, do we talk about how we're Christians because of Christ crucified?

And it's because Jesus died for us. And see how they respond. Praying that they might ask more and be saved. Or do we just talk about the weather and how cold it is?

Because it's cold today, right? We can all imitate others. You've proved it at the start with those claps. And so we're to imitate the OG influencer and have Paul's view of leaders, Paul's way of life, and Paul's talk of Christ.

[27 : 16] Let's pray we would. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for this reminder to imitate the Apostle Paul because he imitated the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so help us, we pray, to so imitate him who imitated Christ. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.