

Christ and Culture

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[0 : 00] So we have been, as a church, working together verse by verse through the book of Romans. You will note today that I had you turn to 1 Corinthians.! We finished chapter 8 a couple of weeks ago and have decided for the summer not to go on to chapter 9.

We believe that in order to remain, keep some continuity going as we get into chapter 10 and 11, as many of the college students come back in the fall, we would always have to re-preach chapter 9 to catch everybody up to where we're going to be talking in 10 and 11 and some of the hard issues there.

And so we preferred to wait. Now, that's not the only reason we're putting it off. I don't want you to think that you're getting lesser sermons because we wanted to wait on that. But there have been some issues both discussed amongst our church and cultural, pretty massive cultural issues going on, that we feel deserve some discussion.

And so today we're going to start a sermon series called Christ and Culture. And I'll explain as we go on what we mean by that term and what that's going to end up looking like for us.

But this morning, the text we're going to be using is going to be kind of the theme text for this sermon series. And so starting in verse 19 of 1 Corinthians chapter 9, let's read together.

[1 : 21] Paul writes, If I was going to say, there's our theme.

Verse 24. Let's pray together.

Father, truly, in this hour we need you, as we do all the time. I need you, by the power of your Spirit, to enable me to speak with clarity, to speak true things from your Word.

And all of us, Father, need your Spirit to apply them to our lives, to understand it, to soak it in, to have it affect and change our hearts. And I pray, God, for our church as we go through this study together over the coming weeks, that you will show us how we can best honor you in all of the areas of our life.

We pray this in the precious name of Christ. So in this series, Christ and Culture, we're seeking to acknowledge culture, that it exists, by discussing and demonstrating exactly how we ought to think, act, believe, and interact with culture.

[3 : 29] But before we get going too far, the main thing I want to show you from our text today is Paul's unwavering commitment to the Gospel. Paul's unwavering commitment to the Gospel.

And his success in it as well. And I want to show you five things, two from the text, others that are just general about Paul's life. Number one, Paul was called by God's Father.

Paul affirms his apostleship in chapter 9, verse 1. And in 1.1 of 1 Corinthians, he says, Paul called by the will of God to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.

And then in 9.16, Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel. Paul had a definite, a firm call in his life to be a preacher of the Gospel of God, as do we all.

None of us are exempt from this. If we are in Christ, we are known by Him, that we all have been given the same call. We're all, in some sense, apostolic, sent to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

[4 : 34] Number two, he was given revelation of Jesus Christ. He saw the Lord, and he therefore had clarity of message. Chapter 9, again, verse 1, he says, Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?

He asked rhetorically, of course I have. Galatians 1.11 and 12, For I would have you know, brothers, that the Gospel that was preached by me is not man's Gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

And in the same way, we as Christians today, in the 21st century, have been given a blessed revelation of Jesus Christ. We have the full, sufficient Word of God, which is a clear picture of our Lord, and we ought to, as a result, want to share it with Him.

Number three, he was guided by the Spirit. You see the Trinitarian motivation of Paul. Acts 13, 2-4, you see the sending, the commissioning of Paul.

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. Then after feasting, fasting, and praying, they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

[5 : 48] So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there sailed, disciples. Romans 8-14, Paul says, For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

And his point there in 8-14 is the affirmation. If you are a son of God, you will be led by the Spirit of God. Your motivations will change. What you desire will be different because the Spirit of God abides in you.

And that motivates, pushes us toward an unwavering commitment to the gospel. Now, in the text where we are today, fourthly, he was encouraged by joy.

He was encouraged by joy. Paul's life was a rough life. By any American standard, Paul suffered greatly. Paul had little to count for in this world.

But yet, he traded the things of this world for the joy that was in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We see in verse 23 that he does all of this, all of his self-denial for the sake of the gospel, that he may share with them those he's winning to Christ in the blessings of the gospel.

[7 : 00] And we see in verse 25 that he's competing for a wreath that is imperishable. That is ultimate and final joy forever. So he was encouraged by joy.

And then fifthly, and where we're going to spend a bit of our time, he was motivated by love. Paul loved people. And he cared for their eternal state.

And I could ask at each one of these points, is this you? Have you been called by the prophet? Have you been given a revelation of Christ? Are you guided by the Spirit? And I hope as Christians you can say yes, because if you can't, then you're not a Christian at all.

You merely claim to be a Christian, but you are not in fact a follower of Christ. I hope that we're encouraged by joy. But mostly this morning, I hope that we're motivated by love.

Do you love people? Are you self-serving or do you serve others? And we see here that Paul is in a state, as he's writing this, of self-denial and self-nutritive.

[8 : 07] So those are the two things I want you to see. Self-denial we see through verse 23. He starts in verse 19. For though I am free from all.

He's free. In the gospel, he is free from all. No longer to serve the ways of man, but to serve God. But what does he do? He makes himself a servant to all.

He denies himself some of the rights he has in the gospel in order that he might better serve. The letter to the Corinthians is all throughout flavored with this issue that was going on in the church at Corinth.

That they were taking their liberty they had in Christ, which they certainly had, but they were taking it to its extreme end. They said, Well, I've been free from the law of God. I can do anything I want to do, right?

Paul affirmed liberty. He said, Yes, you're free in Christ. However, you're to be a servant to all. We as Christians too often lean on liberty.

[9 : 17] Notice Paul in verse 21. He says that he's not outside the law of God, but he's under the law of Christ. We are still called to keep the moral law.

In order to what? Look at the theme all throughout. Verse 19, That I might win more of them. Verse 20, In order to win Jews.

At the end of verse 20, Win those under the law. Verse 21, Not being outside of, Excuse me, I don't know why I'm the wrong thing. Win those outside the law. Verse 22, Win the weak.

And at the end of verse 22, That I might save some. Paul was willing to give up some of the rights that he had in order to serve those to the end of the gospel.

Now hear me carefully. When you don't practice a liberty, as many Christians would say, when you don't practice a liberty, you're not denying yourself freedom in Christ.

[10 : 21] You have the liberty in Christ to do something and to not do something that's gray. Let me give you the example of alcohol. And I hope I'm not opening up a massive can of worms because I'm not going to treat it today in its entirety.

But you would have those who would say, if I don't drink, then I'm denying my liberty in Christ. The freedom that you've given to me, I'm giving it back.

How dare I do such a thing? But actually, as I've done, I've chosen not to drink because of my position. I don't want it to ever be a stumbling block for the gospel in my life. Not necessarily the case for you, but for me, I'm practicing my liberty to not drink. I don't have to do either. I'm free to do what's best and follow my convictions, my conscience in that way. And that's where we get into as we talk about Christ and culture. There's a lot of gray out there. There's much this defined for us.

[11:23] There's a lot of black and white in the scripture. But as we live now in the 21st century, believing that the scripture is fully sufficient for us, God has left us some gray areas, some places that we must be dependent on him and led by his spirit, act appropriately to engage our culture.

Look now to his self-control. Verse 24 through 27, he speaks of this race that lots of people run the race, but not all of them win.

So if we're going to win the race, he's not saying that as Christians, only one of us is getting to the end. He's just saying that if we're going to run the race well, we must discipline ourselves.

We must be self-controlled. Verse 27, he says, but I discipline my body and keep it under control. This is such interesting language.

To keep your body under control is to make it a slave by severe force. That's what the Greek phrase means. And if you have an ESV, which is what I'm preaching from, you'll actually see that the footnote for, but I discipline my body and keep it under control, the footnote translates it, I pummel the body and make it a slave.

[12:38] So it's a fierce act to keep the body under control. For what? Again, remembering the context so that we can serve the end of the gospel.

What do we do? How do we act? What do we believe? What do we say? All these things should be highly disciplined for the sake of the gospel. When he speaks of this wreath that's fading, the perishable wreath, he's referring, as he's talking to the Corinthians, to some games that took place. For the Greeks, sport was very important to them. There was games that took place, yet the Olympic games, we're familiar with those, but the Isthmian games were held every third year in Corinth.

And to even be considered, to be able to enter into those games, you had to have written proof, you had to show that you've been training for at least 10 months to be able to enter into the games. And once you were accepted into the games, you moved to Corinth, if you didn't already live there, and you went through a 30-day training regiment.

There was somebody in charge of the game, and they took you through this rigorous training regiment so that you would be ready to run in the race to earn the ultimate prize, which there was only one winner.

[13:55] Ultimately and finally, there was only one winner, and what they earned at the end of it all was an evergreen wreath. Now in our Olympic games, we get the gold medals. You know the gold medals only worth 110 bucks, that little medal that they hang around their necks.

Fairly trivial, the prize was, but what the evergreen wreath symbolized was immortality. You have won the Isthmian games. You will be remembered forever.

Have any of you heard of the Isthmian games before I mentioned that? Okay, we got one. Okay.

But to prove my point, none of you know who won the Isthmian game. None of you know that.

They weren't immortalized at all. John MacArthur, in speaking on this text, spoke of his time in college as he played football, and he broke a number of records, and they had a record board, and he went back as an alum to an alumni event, and the record board, he noticed many of his records had been replaced with new record holders, and he returned the following year, and the record board had been taken down for some remodeling, and somebody had lost it.

So it didn't even exist anymore at all. And not long after that, the school that he attended shut down altogether, and he used how foolish he was for training himself and thinking that he would be immortalized with his efforts in that way.

[15:17] But we are to train ourselves, to discipline ourselves, to understand how we should act and interact with culture so that we might win prize.

So Christ and culture. And I think we need to define those terms to set us up for the next few weeks. When we say Christ, we're talking about the Lord.

The one who sits at the right hand of the Father. The perfect spotless Lamb. The only sacrifice that was worthy of paying the sins of the church. That's the Christ we're talking about.

We're not talking about hippie Jesus, or good moral teacher Jesus. We're not talking about all the perversions of Christ. We're talking about the Christ of Scripture. And his effect now in the world. So Christ is currently, if you don't know this, he sits at the right hand of the Father in the place of honor, and he reigns there. He holds the world in sway by the power of his word.

[16:21] That's providence. Christ is totally and completely in control of everything that's going on in this world right now. And he has commissioned us by his Spirit as his soldier.

We are the hands and the feet and the mouthpiece of Christ. He multiplied us to the world. I used to think, how great it would be if Jesus walked the earth now. What could he accomplish now if Jesus walked the earth?

He's accomplishing much more at the right hand of the Father because he's given his Spirit to those who follow him. And he's multiplied us across the world to advance his kingdom. He ushered in the kingdom of God.

He inaugurated the kingdom of God when he came, lived, died, resurrected. And he's in the process now of seeing it come to full culmination. So we live in a place right now where we're kind of in between two worlds.

What is the kingdom of God has come and what is yet to be the full realization of it. That's the Christ that we're talking about. So that includes us when we talk about Christ in culture.

[17:26] And that's primarily what we're going to be discussing over the coming weeks. How is it that we function within the world that we live in as Christians for the sake of the gospel?

So that's the Christ. Culture. We've got to talk about this at a little bit greater length and it deserves a short water break. This is a much debated topic.

How do we define culture? Now for a lot of people when they think of culture they think of high culture. Like we need to get you cultured. So we're going to take you to the opera. We're going to have you taste fine wines.

I'm going to teach you how to use a knife and a fork properly. That's what we think of culture. That's not really what culture is. Culture runs the gamut. You could say we're talking about both high culture and low culture.

We could say we're talking about those who go to fine meals and opera and those who play Xbox and eat Twinkies. We're talking about all things in culture. So here's your cultural definition that we're going to operate under although there are many others.

[18:34] If you want this for your notes see me afterward because it's a little bit long. So you hear me out here. Culture consists of the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society.

Culture includes many societal aspects. Language, art, customs, values, norms, folklores, tools, technologies, products, organizations, and institutions.

I'm sure that's not exhausting. It includes basically everything we encounter day to day. Off the website Christ and Pop Culture which I'll commend to you.

It's a really fun read. They say, Culture is everywhere. You can attempt to avoid it but even if you succeeded those around you are immersed in it.

Culture is more than just television, film, music, and the things people indulge themselves with the past time. It's politics. It's lifestyle. It's the common knowledge of our age.

[19:32] You could say it's the common sense of our age. Now some 50 plus years ago a man named Richard Niebuhr wrote a book called Christ and Culture.

Culture. And I would presume that none of you have read it. I haven't read it. I've read a critique of it but I haven't read the book itself. But it has been the predominant narrative in the church and how we function with culture.

And the danger of the book is right in some aspects but the danger of the book is that it's reductionary. It makes things too simple. And what it has tended to cause the church to do is one of two things.

It's either become isolationistic. Totally withdraw culture altogether. The Amish would be a good example of that. They have said all things of the world are evil.

I'm not of the world. Therefore we will do everything of our own. That's the one danger.

Fundamentalism would be another example of that. The other side of that is an attempt to totally meld the gospel into current culture.

[20 : 38] The emergent movement would be an example of that. Where the message itself is actually being changed to try to make it culturally relevant as if the gospel hasn't always been relevant to people who need a savior.

So those are the two end extremes and that's kind of tended to be what happened and we could probably find ourselves in varying areas of our life doing one of those two things. That's why I think that this is all so important for us to discuss.

So let's talk a little bit more about how complicated culture can be. We exist in varying cultures. There is certainly a meta-narrative of the world, a broad culture, the human culture, in which we are all sinners separated from God.

We all have a sin nature. We all need a savior. That's a shared commonality between all of us. A subset of that would be those who know Christ, the church, and I don't mean anybody who attends a church, I mean those who are truly regenerate and belong to God and those who don't.

Those would be subsets of that culture but think about some of the other things you do, the operations that you have, the groups and societies you belong to that share beliefs and commonalities and symbols and those types of things.

[21 : 58] I used to whitewater kayak a lot. I don't get to do that really anymore but I used to do it a lot and that was subculture. There was a language we had, the term booth.

If you're a whitewater kayaker, you know exactly what that means. If you're not, you have no clue what we're talking about. There's terminology like that. So there are tons of subcultures we exist within.

Each of us as individuals exist within multiple cultures, all kinds of cultures and they're not these concentric circles. They're circles that overlap, that are very fuzzy at the edges.

You might have a group that you identify with but not in every way. Your sorority or paternity may do that. You share some of the common values of brotherhood and sisterhood but you may not really appreciate some of the parting that goes on within your paternity or sorority.

The lines become fuzzy and they overlap. Very complicated if we look at culture and what that means. It would be nice to just divide it all up into nice little pods and deal with it but we can't.

[23 : 00] So really every individual is their own set of complicated cultural interactions. And what we're trying to accomplish as Christians is we're trying to filter all of our cultural experience through the gospel of Christ and ultimately see everyone else's cultural experience come under the auspice of the gospel.

We want it to reign in their lives as well. Which means it'll change some of the things we do. It'll change some of our belief structures. That's what we're going to be talking about through the varying topics over the coming weeks.

How should Christians believe about certain things? What are the gray areas and how can we seek the spirit to live properly in those areas of our lives? Important things to discuss.

We're ultimately waiting. As we interact with the world we're trying to disarm them. I've heard a great analogy this week. The guy talked about how every person you have a conversation about the gospel with is holding a rock in their hand.

And that rock is waiting to beat you with it but it's built of preconceived notions. It's built of their past experience with the gospel. And what we're trying to do as we interact with them is get them to put down the rock and listen.

[24 : 21] Now I fully recognize the spirit of God must intervene in somebody's life for them to become saved. Must. But he's given us means by which he uses.

So we should have a methodology. We should understand people. We should seek first to understand then be understood. We should try to get them to put the rock down. The Protestant Evangelical Church as well as many other denominations that claim to follow Christ have put a widening chasm between us and the lost.

And it's happening all the time. We live in a politically charged nation that has lots of Christian value pushed up under political decisions and a lot of that makes that chasm wider and wider.

The picture in my mind is always of church leaders and politicians standing on a bank that's crumbling in and they keep kicking the sides of it and they just keep crumbling and they take a step back and they keep kicking the sides and this gap gets wider and wider and wider and our goal as Christians is not to make the chasm wider but to build a bridge and we might share the gospel with those who are lost.

So culture is a complicated thing. What I really want you to see in all of that not to dishearten you but to get you to see that you cannot avoid interacting with culture. There's no way around it.

[25 : 47] And as a Christian as a follower of Christ he must permeate all of those interactions and all of those things that you do. So let's look at Paul a little bit as to how we should then function in our varying cultural context.

He says in chapter 9 verse 22 and 23 here's kind of our theme verses I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some I do it all for the sake of the gospel that I might share with them in its blessing.

But we know that Paul doesn't seek the approval of men right? Paul doesn't seek the approval of men Galatians 1 10 for am I now seeking the approval of man or of God or am I trying to please man if I were still trying to please man I would not be servant of Christ.

Interesting. 2nd Corinthians 4 2 he says remember in verse 21 of chapter 9 he says that he's not outside the law of God but under the law of Christ so we don't become the culture we don't become the people we're trying to share Christ with but we figure out how to understand them that we might better share the truth with them you've probably if you've been in the church long heard the phrase we're called to be in the world but not of the world and that's not actually found anywhere in scripture nowhere did Jesus say you should be in the world but not of the world it's kind of an extrapolation it's kind of a combination of a number of verses so it's certainly true we're meant to be here we were left behind with a very specific mission but we're not meant to look like the set apart Jesus said that he was not of the world John 8 23 he said to them you are from below I am from above you are of this world I am not of this world Jesus said that his followers are not of this world John 15 19 if you were of the world the world would love you as its own but because you are not of the world but I chose you out of the world therefore the world hates you Paul taught that we are not to be conformed to this world Romans 12 2 do not be conformed to this world be transformed by the renewing of your mind so we're meant to be set apart we're meant to be sanctified that's what that term means Sam and I have a plate a red and blue plate and it says on it you are very special and it is our set apart plate for honored guests and for birthdays and things of that sort that's what that term sanctified means we're meant to be set apart we're meant to be holy as God is holy so I'm not talking about compromise

[28 : 38] I'm not talking about becoming something that doesn't look like Jesus Christ what I'm talking about is operating as Paul operated in the gray areas in those things that aren't explicitly spelled out for us being led by the spirit of God so that we might serve those who are lost D.Ed Carson who's a professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School wrote a book called Christ and Culture Revisited which I have a copy of here if you are in the mood for something incredibly petty I tell you this is a great read I'm working my way through it right now but I wanted to read you a quick quote from it he says the unease we feel at such tension the tension of being Christian being in the world but not of it will not be resolved until the last day we await the return of Jesus Christ the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth the dawning of the resurrection the glory of perfection the beauty of holiness until that day we are a people in tension on the one hand we belong to the broader culture in which we find ourselves on the other we belong to the culture of the consummated kingdom of God which has dawned among us our true city is the new

Jerusalem even while we still belong to Paris or Budapest or New York or Lumpkin or Hall or Dawson White County and while we await the consummation we gratefully and joyfully confess that the God of all is our God and that we have been called to give him glory acknowledge his reign and bear witness to his salvation by the proclamation of the gospel we anticipate the conversion of men and women from every language and people and nation and as redeemed human beings we seek the peace and prosperity of the city in which we find ourselves until the new Jerusalem comes down from heaven this is that critique I was talking about of Niebuhr's Christ and culture the reductionary nature of it and Carson fully affirms that we're going to live in this tension but we must as Christians understand it we must get why there are chasms between us and a lot we must understand the stones they hold in their hands if we love them there's the motivating power of love in Paul's life that we can see that he was willing to become all things all people he was willing to lay down some of his rights a wonderful example of this in scriptures from Acts 16 when Paul takes Timothy with him to go along with them to build disciples and plant churches do you recall what Paul does to Timothy he was

Greek he circumcised him he's a grown man he circumcised Timothy that seems crazy to us doesn't it not if we have this perspective what Paul knew was that Timothy's uncircumcision would be a stumbling block to weak Jews back in our text in 1 Corinthians he says to the weak I became weak he's not talking about weak in physical strength he's talking about those who are willing to see who cannot yet see the liberty that we have in Christ he's talking about those judgmental narrow minded people that drive all of us so crazy in the church part of what he's talking about here right so as he's taking Timothy along with him he knows he's going to encounter those type of people and as such he asked Timothy to also be weak to follow some of the old law in order to because it's a gray area in that case it wasn't necessary that he be circumcised but it didn't matter if he was or was not so they were led by the spirit to circumcise him that they might close the chasm have them drop the rock and they could share the true gospel of Jesus

Christ it's a really wonderful example of what I'm trying to get you to see so we're going to be talking about what is optional and what is not optional what are the closed fist issues that our Christian culture should have and what are the open handed issues we talk a lot about that about our church here the non-negotiables of the closed fist issues there are things that you should not even come and talk to me about changing about our church our statement of faith don't even ask you want to add something to maybe we can talk about that but those are doctrinal statements that we have affirmed together as a church and we will not change those are closed fist issues open handed issues those are things we can talk about the order of the service we have convictions as we should have convictions about everything we do we have convictions about the way we do things but I'll talk about that with you talk about if you'd rather have all the music at the end or all We split it in the middle it doesn't really matter that much right we can talk about these things but not these so that's what we're going to be seeking to find together as we talk about culture and praise

God we have the spirit of God to lead us in those things much of the coming sermons are going to have some opinion I promise you I will state it as opinion I will tell you I think this would be best but I don't know scripture doesn't explicitly say that is how you must interact with your culture but there are definite things that are close-fisted that we must believe to be true to interact with our culture around us Mark Driscoll uses a little easy to remember deal to talk about culture he uses three terms reject receive redeem so as you filter culture through your life you can think about those things that you should reject there are definitely things in culture that we shouldn't interact with pornography for example there's no reason that any Christian should ever involve themselves in anything like that you shouldn't watch pornography with a friend that you might get a chance to share the gospel with and you shouldn't you should reject it entirely as a

[34 : 47] Christian there's some things we should just receive there's some things that are just good and enjoyable food can be one of those things in our life there's just some good food and you don't have to really worry about what it means for you to eat certain foods you just receive that and there are some things that should be redeemed and a great example of that is Halloween I don't think as Christians and this is opinion I'm going to tell you that I don't think as Christians we should reject Halloween I understand that it's a pagan holiday it's got some roots in that I get all that but I think it's something we should be working to redeem the night of the week that we get together and the kids dress up and we give them candies not inherently evil we should be working on building connections with our community and loving people even though we don't completely agree with what's going on but there's an example of what it would be to redeem something and all of these things these fuzzy edges these gray areas we can depend on the Holy Spirit in our lives to bring us conviction so as we study these various topics and I know that some of you may not even be here but as you think through these various topics we really need to ask ourselves two important questions how should the

Christian culture true Christian culture Christ think believe about particular topics and then how then should we interact with other cultures to best advance the gospel do we love people to that degree to the degree that we will be self denying and self controlling that the great end of the gospel is more important to us than the things that we've been liberated to do I hope that we can all confidently say yes of course we would gladly serve the world that way and I'll tell you if you can't say that then you don't know the heart of your savior he certainly wants to see and save the lost to do so in the most effective means possible he wants his kingdom to advance and he wants to use us praise God he loves us so much he wants to use us to make that happen and so I pray for us as a church as we meet together that we might have this mind that Paul had this willingness willing

willing the desire to do whatever it took provided you to cross the lines but to function in those gray areas in the second of the gospel let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray let's pray