

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com

www.lightfordarktimes.com

God's Word to a Hesitating Church

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

“Libertinism, Legalism, and the Truth”

March 15, 2015

Sermon Text: Selected

Scripture Reading: Matt 23:23-39

Introduction-

Before we conclude our study of 2 Corinthians, which we plan to do next week, I thought it would be a good idea for us to step back and survey the landscape of what we learn from the errors of this church at Corinth and the

Apostle Paul's instruction to them. And I suppose we could sum it up something like this:

- To the Left – Libertinism
- To the Right – Legalism
- Back to Center – The Gospel

It really is true that we human beings can be given to extremes. And perhaps nowhere is the danger of being unbalanced than in the realm of religion. Certainly the world is going to consider a true Christian “unbalanced.” We are fools in the thinking of this world. The wisdom of God is foolishness to the natural man.

But this is being a fool *for Christ*, and that is a noble thing. What we want to look at this morning is how these Corinthians acted as fools in *God's measure*. It seems to me that Paul's First Letter to them, 1 Corinthians, evidences their bent toward the error of *libertinism*, while this Second Letter we have been studying shows that they had yielded to Jewish false teachers,

legalists, who had come in among them. From left to right they went.

Every true Christian, every real Christian church (which we hope ours is) battles these extremes. We have had our battles here with legalism. Now, as we recognize those errors, we must be wise and not swing wide of the mark into *libertinism*. Both errors abound in the visible church today. Those, for example, who embrace patriarchy are going to enslave themselves and others to all kinds of legalistic approaches to earning God's favor. On the other hand, we see an increasing wave of libertinism tempting us to believe that really, just about anything goes and it's quite alright with the Lord.

To the Left – Libertinism and the Abuse of Grace

There are numbers of passages in 1 Corinthians that reveal the abuse of God's grace – libertinism – among the Corinthians. Here is one:

1 Corinthians 6:9-20 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor

revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

(11) And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

(12) "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be enslaved by anything. (13) "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food"--and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (14) And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.

(15) Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! (16) Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." (17) But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. (18) Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. (19) Or do you not

know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, (20) for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Those first two verses are desperately needed truths for Christians to hear in our day. *Do not be deceived.* This warning assumes that the danger of deception is a reality. That there is a deceiver. A liar. And the lie in question goes something like this:

I believe in Jesus. He has forgiven me for all my sin. No matter what I do, He will forgive me. He knows I am weak. We are not saved by keeping the Law, but by grace alone. So don't judge me.

Or it can go like this:

Since the Law has been done away with by Jesus [that's a lie, it has been written on our hearts] then how I live is irrelevant. I can be a Christian and live in immorality. How I live has no bearing on God's acceptance of me.

Or even like this:

Oh, neat! I'm a Christian too. And so is my boy/girl friend. We have lived together for 3 years now.

My goal in life is to get rich. God wants me rich.

In other words, in these last examples, what we see is not so much ANTI-nomianism (against law), but rather what we might call A-nomianism (lawless). Clueless lawlessness. "Christians" who never really even entertained a thought (at least an unsuppressed one) that God just might have laws against how they are living.

The libertines can be a nasty bunch. While they go on and on about not judging and how we must be widely tolerant, their fangs come out quickly if you admonish them even slightly. I know a professing Christian who puts immodest if not virtually pornographic pictures of herself online, and when she is called to task for it she is quite vicious. We have seen the very same thing in this church, more than once. The pressure has been put on us to be "forgiving" and "tolerant" like "Jesus." When we would not, well, as I said, here came the fangs.

And here is a real conversation among these "Christians" with a wicked atheist thrown in the mix. Here is one of the great dangers of social media if we are not discerning. This kind of conversation is VERY typical!

D - Christianity has been distorted and now too often focuses on micromanaging people's lives and controlling them. But I am learning now the meaning of James 1:27: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. "

Jesus said it best when He said that apart from loving God, no other commandment is greater than loving your neighbour as yourself.

I am not quite sure anymore what theological camp I am sitting in but I know my religion consists of putting PEOPLE first and not abstract concepts or systems. Organized religion scares me. I know that hardly any religious people would deliberately try to hurt someone or manipulate them, but that is the effect it seems to have. I don't want to have to conform to some group's standards to be accepted. I want to be free to grow in my understanding of God and change accordingly, in an organic way, in my own way and in my own time. I don't want to be manipulated ever again by religious systems or groups.

B - True. The Lord knows your heart and is faithful. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. It is ONLY be His grace

and love, no one earns it by being good enough.

K- Exactly. It is people who judge, God understands.

D- I'm spiritual and have come to my own understanding but I don't believe in organized religion in any way ! If anything I find it all money orientated and controlled . A cult! Read the bible, pray to God, be a good person is all I try and do

A - I am a pantheist; a philosophical or cosmological believer of inconceivable infinity which I consider God (the movie Theory of Everything explained this well). It coincides with every philosophy of religion I studied.

K No god.. no jesus...you have the higher power in your heart..you are god..jesus..you are the one.that controls your own destiny..

K You feed the wolf.you want to survive.anger,bitter, hate.or compassion.love , peace..its all in you..feed the right wolf.and you are god..

K- Where you are safe in your comfort of beliefs..its your journey..go with your heart..dont let others lead your path for you..

C- In his life Jesus was the hardest on the religious – especially the Pharisees he called them hypocrites and whitewashed tombs- they looked good on the outside but on the inside they were spiritually dead. Jesus came to be the end of all religion, it is people who distort the truth of Jesus. We can never be good enough to earn God's favor or bad enough to lose his love.

You will come through this with a stronger faith than you had going into this.. It's not religion that we need to follow it is Jesus. Although it's hard not to pay attention to those around us who can't possibly understand what we are experiencing and choose to judge us instead of love us . God knows your heart and this is all between you and him and that is all that matters.

What is God's Word on libertinism? Here we have it in these much-needed and little-heeded words for our day:

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Do not be deceived. Do NOT be deceived. You have all kinds of people trying to deceive you. Don't be fooled. Here is God's absolute truth:

People who live and walk in-

- ***Sexual immorality***
- ***Idolatry***
- ***Adultery***
- ***Homosexuality***
- ***Thievery***
- ***Greediness***
- ***Drunkenness***
- ***Reviling***
- ***Swindling***

-are not forgiven by God, will not see the new heavens and new earth, are not justified by Christ, and will end in hell.

Furthermore, *Christians are NOT such people –*

(11) And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

In our day it is really quite the same. Notice that on this list (which of course is not comprehensive, ie, it is not a complete list of every sin), 1/3 (3 of 9) concern sexual sin. In fact Paul elaborated on sexual sin in vss 12-20.

Corinth was like our day, and it is very likely that our day is even worse and growing worse all the time. Twenty years ago you would not have been as likely to anger people who profess to be Christians by saying that Fifty Shades of Grey is perversion, pornographic, evil wickedness. Today you will be attacked by people who claim to be Christians if you speak out against this. They will say “we are free in Christ and can do what we like so stop judging us.”

The other items on Paul’s example list here include something called *reviling*. To revile someone is to strike at them, to assault them, with words. Villification. Speaking evil but in an assaultive and attacking manner. The reviler is the tongue lasher. Abusers are revilers, for example. They use words to hurt others. And they do it habitually and without repentance. We have had to deal with this kind in this church more than once. They all put on an outward display of being a fine Christian, and yet we very often felt the sting of their words. We did not realize what this thing was for a long, long time – we just knew that you could never really be comfortable around such a person.

But here is the foundational fact Paul is getting at here:

We must not be deceived by the libertine lie. Any person, no matter how much wool they glue onto their outer appearance, who walks in sin is not a sheep. They do not belong to Christ and they will end in hell unless they turn and repent and believe in Christ. They will end in hell. They will not inherit the kingdom.

Let’s use a real life example here that has touched us in this church. You will feel the deception and how it tempts us to think that God surely will accept these kinds of people. Here you are. Let’s say you are the one who gets the phone call. It is from a woman who you have known for along time, who professes to be a Christian and who has been in your church and talked the Christian talk. You also know that she has years of history of immorality, all the while claiming to be a Christian. So she calls you and says to you “I am living with a man who is not my husband. I know this is wrong and I plan to tell him to move out but I don’t want to hurt his feelings. He is not a Christian, and I am thinking that God might use me and all this situation to lead this man to Christ.”

And so you tell her – what? To the degree that you have been deceived by the libertine lie, you will go rather soft on the matter, right? “Jesus understands. You have gone through a

rough time. The Lord will forgive you, and yes, let's pray for this man's salvation."

But what are you going to tell her if you are faithful to God's truth as we see right here in this Scripture before us this morning? It will go something more like this: "I understand that you have sinned, and the Lord stands ready to forgive you. But you must repent. You must break off from this man and this sin, now. You must realize that if you choose to walk in this sin, you must not be deceived – you will end in hell. You need to flee from this like Lot fled from Sodom, and don't look back. Do not be deceived. The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. The sexually immoral will not inherit the kingdom of God."

At that point you will discover if there is true repentance working, or libertinism that loves its license to sin.

Do not be deceived. Paul says it twice here. Do not be deceived. A person who is a thief will not see heaven. A person who is greedy for this world's riches is going to end in hell. A person who loves and practices adultery or homosexuality or other sexual immorality, who is not repentant and fails to turn from it, will end in hell.

Such a person is not righteous before God. They are not a Christian.

That is the left. That is libertinism.

To the Right – Legalism

While libertinism's lie is "you are already righteous in Christ, so it doesn't matter how you live," the deception of legalism is "how you live is vitally important because you must continue to earn merit with God."

Which is more dangerous? Left, or right? Both are a false gospel, a false Jesus, and are animated by a false spirit. Both will lead to hell because both leave a person UN-righteous before God. In some ways I suppose however that the right, legalism, can be more deceptive at least in the sense that it wears such a "holy" disguise AND because it can be more alluring to someone who is a genuine Christian, sincere about pleasing the Lord. While the libertine's disguise is Christianity while he pursues his sins, the legalist is that whitewashed tomb, that outwardly clean cup that looks so religious and righteous. Jesus had much to say about these kind – and none of it was good.

Legalism is the primary threat seen in 2 Corinthians (as well as Galatians). These Jewish false teachers had crept

in, maligning Paul, all with the goal of *enslaving* the people. You see it in verses like these:

2 Corinthians 11:3-4 But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (4) For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

2 Corinthians 11:20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul lays bare the real motive of these kind -

Romans 16:17-18 I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. (18) For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.

Legalists are not really zealous for the Lord. They are zealous for their own appetite for power and self-glory. At minimum they embrace a false gospel whereby the sinner must make himself righteous before God by his own doings. As we learned in Galatians however, this is the route of law and the law only brings a curse upon those who seek to be justified by it.

I think most all of us have had our eras of legalism. In our zeal to serve the Lord and to reject the rank libertinism so widespread in today's church, we want to be pleasing to God. We want to obey Him. We want to *do* something to honor and serve Him. And we want His blessing upon us and upon our children. We don't want to see our children going the way of the world. So legalism can be very appealing in all of its promises – which are false promises in the end.

Legalism forgets about the Spirit of Christ in us. Instead, it sets up rules – often human traditions, calling them the word of God – and then says “do this and don't do that and then you will be pleasing to God.” The sad truth of the matter, and the trap, is this:

Legalism always ends up, with its emphasis upon the letter of the law, forgetting about the things that God is

most concerned with: mercy, love, kindness.

Matthew 12:1-7 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. (2) But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." (3) He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: (4) how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? (5) Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? (6) I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. (7) And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

Legalism condemns the wrong people! It sees people who are truly free in Christ, led by His Spirit, and condemns them for being free! At the same time, legalism exalts the wicked, the prideful – like the Pharisees.

I have to say that this seems to me to be the very error rampant in ARBCA right now. It is legalism run amok, not concerned with mercy, but rather with the letter and we are seeing evidence of the guiltless being condemned. In their zeal to build a fence around the law (the confession of faith in this case), these zealots are creating a new talmud/mishnah commentary that is becoming that heavy, burdensome load Jesus spoke of – the one that no one can bear. Follow these minute rules we are creating and it will guarantee that you keep the law and please God!

What is the solution? Where must we go? Well, we must cease going left or right, and return to center. To the Way. To the truth of Christ. And we can be sure that the enemy will always be trying to swing us one way or the other.

Back to the Center: The Gospel

Ephesians 2:1-10 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature

children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- (6) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (7) so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Why does the Christian obey the moral law of God? So that bad things won't happen to him? So that God won't be mad at him today? No. A Christian's standing with the Lord is certain and secure. We are His children, adopted, loved. A Christian obeys God's law because we love Christ and we love His Word, and we love others. We do right because we want to do right. There is no room for bragging about how "good" we are because as Paul notes here, even the good things we do were prepared by God long ago.

Christian, you do not need to make God happy with you. He already is, as a father is lovingly pleased with his own child. It is this "abba, Father" relationship.

What happens when we sin, as every Christian in this life still does? Well, we see our sin, we hate it, and we repent of it. We go to our Father and we say "Father, I have done wrong. I have sinned against you." We don't need His threatening and thundering to make us fearful and out of that fear we tell Him our sin and hope that He doesn't incinerate us. No, the new person we are in Christ grieves over our sin, repents, and asks the Father to forgive us – and He does.

Christian, you do not need to live everyday of your life motivated by some weight hanging over your head that tells you that you must do this and that and thereby make God happy with you today. That is legalism's heavy yoke, and it is not of Christ. This legalism is most often characterized by rules and sanctions made up by man which weigh people down with a burden the Lord never intended. Guard yourself against such rules. They are a yoke of slavery and we are commanded to not permit anyone to put them on us -

Colossians 2:20-23 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-- (21) "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)--according to human precepts and teachings? (23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

How does the gospel deal with the left – libertinism? Well, it says (see Romans 6) that we who have died and been raised up with Christ as new creations shall obviously not go on living as the old person we once were. We will not use grace as an excuse to sin all the more. God's Law has been written on our hearts and therefore is part of our very nature in Christ. We obey God because we love Him and want to obey and please Him. We grieve and repent when we do not.

Obedience to Christ in other words is the fruit of genuine faith. I read my Bible because I want to read my Bible, and when I am negligent in doing so the Spirit in me convicts me and brings

me back to the Word. I gather together on the Lord's Day to worship God with my brothers and sisters in Christ because I want to give worship and praise to Christ my Redeemer. I give offerings to the Lord and to others out of love for them, not because I am afraid that if I don't God will be sure that something bad happens to me.

This is freedom. This is life in Christ, led by His Spirit. The devil hates it. Don't let him deceive you into swerving right or left. The Old Testament speaks of this – and now we know that the straight path is Christ:

Proverbs 4:25-27 Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. (26) Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. (27) Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

Translated by the New Testament:

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (2) looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising

the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.