

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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What Does the Real Church Look Like? *August 13, 2023*

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 1:10-31

1Co 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

Almost every week someone asks me if I can recommend a good church to them in their area. By “good,” they mean, as I take it, “biblical.” A true church. And they ask because they have been looking and looking and they keep coming up empty.

Typically, the Protestant Reformers held that a true church of Jesus Christ must be characterized by three things:

- The preaching of God’s Word
- The observation of the sacraments or ordinances (the Lord’s Table and Baptism)
- And the practice of church discipline

Many local churches today fail this threefold test. Rome of course fails at all three points – they do not preach the Word of God, they have invented sacraments not ordained by Christ and even their practice of the Lord’s Table and Baptism are immersed in heretical doctrine. Do they practice church discipline faithfully? No.

But I want to talk to you this morning, or rather show you from

God's Word, that there is necessarily something even more fundamental which must be present if a church is a true church. This quality is described in our text for this morning (as well as in verse 17 which I just read) -

1Co 2:1-5 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. (2) **For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.** (3) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, (4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) **so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.**

What does the true church look like? Well, in this fallen world it looks like a bunch of fools who believe a foolish message. We just heard Paul state it:

1Co 1:18 For the word of the cross

is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

What does the true church look like? What does a local church that is truly the body of Christ, look like? Listen to this:

“It is important to notice that the church is not triumphant in this world; she does not shine with the kind of splendor and magnificence that would capture our hearts with just one glimpse and make us her devotees. Often, she is desolate and disfigured. This is all the more noteworthy when applied to Rome. How must they set out to prove that they are the true church? They surely need some evidence. Yet all they can point to is their wealth, their popularity, and all their pomp and splendor.

But this is not the way that God desires His church to be known. Rather, the Lord Jesus Christ desires to reign here below, surrounded by His enemies. He has chosen that His disciples must experience those things of which

He warned them, . In other words, they will be rejected by the world and be despised; people will wag their tongues at them, and trouble them, giving them no peace nor rest in this life (see Matthe 10:16ff).

Therefore, when we speak of the church, let us remember what Paul tells us – that she is like a barren woman who is alone in her household, and without support or help. She is rejected and ignored, and has one foot in the grave, as it were. But God promises that she will be restored, and will have more children than she that is married and enjoys honor and a good name now.

I tell you, we need to bear this teaching in mind today. We see the church trampled upon, and the enemies of the truth acting so proudly and venomously towards here. When we witness such things, let us patiently wait for God to gather together His elect, content meanwhile in the knowledge that we are His children, though the world despises and rejects us.

Thus, if we wish to know what the church is, let us not look for it with an eye full of vanity, like those who seek only pomp and beautiful appearances. On the contrary, let us remember that God will afflict His poor church to the point that it has no beauty or attraction in the eyes of men, but rather appears desolate. Even if everyone rises up against the church, let us be content to be one of God’s children. And let us only join with those who are the true children of God, who have the infallible seal of the Holy Spirit and refuse simply to follow the crowd.” [John Calvin, Sermons on Galatians, Banner of Truth Trust]

Do not envy the “church” which appears to be a success in the eyes of the world. If you do, you will be envying antichrist.

This is why the Apostle Paul said what he did to the Corinthians. Listen again and think very carefully about what a true ministry of Christ looks like:

1Co 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the

gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

And again:

1Co 2:1-5 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. (2) **For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.** (3) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, (4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) **so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.**

Many churches (if they are churches at all) and ministers and elders in those churches, strive to present Christ and the gospel *in a manner and with methods which appeal to the natural man*. As an example, I was invited this past week to come to an event organized by numbers of the

churches in this community. The stated purpose was to find ways and methods in which this joint effort could “impact the community” for Christ. It read like this:

We are going to discuss strategic ways to reach our communities and how to work together to complement each other. Each church has a dynamic place in every community and we cannot achieve the Great Commission without working together... inspiring and supporting each other to succeed.

On September 16th, we, the County Wide Prayer Team, has rented the BIG TENT and will be having worship, exhortation, and showcasing the Christian Programs available to people through the Body of Christ.

There will be an evening outreach to Youth from 6:30-8:30pm. There will be high energy Christian Worship.

I never participate in such things. For one thing, it is not true that we must work together with all the churches, because many of them embrace a false gospel. You can see it in these words – they believe that numbers and human programs and strategies are necessary to win people to Christ. High energy worship, there it is.

But further, this kind of thing is exactly what Paul is rejecting.

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. (2) **For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.**

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, (4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom,

And we can take this even a step further. Not only are these “wisdom of men” methods ineffective, *they actually empty the*

*gospel of its power. They detract from the Lord Jesus Christ and they work to put men’s attention upon men.... “to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, **so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.**”*

God does not work through nor bless man’s “high energy” efforts. Why? Because He chooses to work through our weakness so that only He receives the glory. Any preacher or church that uses “cleverness of speech,” or “persuasive words of wisdom” (ie, human wisdom) immediately makes the cross of Christ, which is the power of God for salvation, emptied and His power.

What is it that God blesses with His saving power? It is His Word. It is the gospel of Christ. What is it that is the real answer to these churches’ search for “methods”? It is this: *Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The gospel. And that gospel is foolishness to the natural man.*

Most people, even many who claim to be Christian, are Pharisees – in this sense. They do not believe that they are sinners in God’s sight. They believe that by their own works they are accepted by God and He will overlook their “imperfections.” When the gospel is faithfully presented to them, they recoil. Why? Because it begins with a crucified Savior. It begins with Someone who apparently miserably failed in His mission.

But this Cross is also a stumbling block to the natural man because the Cross necessarily means that our sins were so serious that we were under God’s curse. That we are condemned by Him. So He sent His Son to become a curse for us.

This is the message that God blesses with His power. But as soon as Christians or a local church or church leaders decide that the gospel must be presented in a way that is acceptable to the sinner, it is emptied of God’s saving power.

Look once more:

1Co 2:1-5 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (3) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, (4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) **so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.**

Many people who think they have been saved, who think that they are Christians, who think they have been born again – have not been born again at all. Why? Because they have believed, not in Christ, but in the “superiority of speech” – in other words, their faith rests in a man, not in Christ. Their “conversion” was the result of the logic or rhetoric by which the gospel was presented to them, but not as a result of the Holy Spirit powerfully working in them to

regenerate their hearts and make them a new creation.

What does a true church look like?
It looks:

- Foolish
- A failure
- Weak
- Focused always upon Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

It is not an impressive, huge building. It is not a large crowd. It is not a place identified with a man. It is not a place where people are always searching for some new “clever” way to appeal to the world. It is not a place where a hypocrite is going to be happy because there will be no glory for him.

Rev 2:8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

Rev 2:9 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Rev 2:10 'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Peter knew this when he spoke to that lame man:

Act 3:1-6 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. (2) And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. (3) When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. (4) But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" (5) And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. (6) But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but

what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene—walk!"

In the name of Jesus Christ. That is what Peter had. The man's healing is given as a picture of salvation.

That is what the Lord has been teaching us in this church, and I hope that all of us, myself especially, have been hearing Him. What do we have to offer? A famous master of rhetoric preacher – a kind of celebrity? No! Do we have a full menu of programs – for children, for teens, for young marrieds, for middle aged and for seniors. No!

But what we do have is this – *In the name of Jesus Christ, we present to you a Savior who, if you turn from your own sinful way and put your entire faith in Him as payment for your sins and the only means by which you can be put right with God, you will be saved.* That is what we have.

- A vast treasure hidden
- A pearl of GREAT price

The Church Will not Triumph in this World

Remember what Calvin said:

“It is important to notice that the church is not triumphant in this world; she does not shine with the kind of splendor and magnificence that would capture our hearts with just one glimpse and make us her devotees.”

Now, this does not mean that the gates of hell prevail against Christ's church. That cannot be. What it does mean is that *Christ's church will not be “triumphant” in this world in the sense that the world measures triumph and greatness.* No, the true church in this present world is like this:

Mar 4:30-32 And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? (31) "It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, (32) yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than

all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE."

Luk 13:20-21 And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? (21) "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

Luk 17:20-21 Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; (21) nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."

Understand? There is coming a day, that Day, when Christ's kingdom will be revealed in glory. When Christ comes in triumph and His bride, the church, will be glorious for all to see:

Rev 21:1-3 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first

heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. (2) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

But that day is not yet. The leaven of the gospel spreads. The mustard seed grows. But in this present era, in this world, *Christ's church is largely invisible. And therefore it is a great and serious error to look for the church in anything that is regarded as glorious and triumphant in the world's eyes.*

Now think about this very carefully. I have no hesitation to say that most people, even most professing Christians – each of us at times – get this wrong. Satan comes and he whispers – “*You are wasting your time. Look at yourselves. You are a failure. Look at Rome. Look at that booming and*

bustling “church” down the road.”
And if we listen to that lie from the pit, we will be discouraged and even mislead from Christ’s true church and the true gospel. We will be like the Galatians:

Gal 1:6-7 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; (7) which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

The disciples had it all wrong as well:

Mat 24:1-2 Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. (2) And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

Understand? They identified the kingdom of God with that earthly temple. They were quite impressed with its magnificence. Jesus was

not. It would be destroyed in 70AD and Jesus’ words to them was essentially this: *this temple is not the true temple. This temple is not My church.*

“It is important to notice that the church is not triumphant in this world; she does not shine with the kind of splendor and magnificence that would capture our hearts with just one glimpse and make us her devotees.”

Listen to this amazing statement by the Lord Jesus:

Luk 18:8 "I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

If you have been following the mid-week Bible study on Revelation [by the way, we began a mid-week study on Romans this last week] then you know that the “church” that is going to grow in splendor, size, and magnificence in this world is the “church” of the Antichrist. When Christ comes

again, the true church will have largely been eliminated by the Dragon and his Beast and False Prophet. This antichrist spirit has been and is presently energetically at work in the world now “growing his church.” That is, his kingdom. And one day God will, in His perfect sovereignty and for His glory, permit Antichrist to be revealed and to deceive the whole world. A large part of that deception, as it has always been, is going to be a “church.” An outwardly magnificent entity so that virtually all of mankind in the world will respond this way:

Rev 13:4 they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

See it? Mankind will worship the Antichrist.

Rev 13:7-8 It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and

people and tongue and nation was given to him. (8) All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

To make war with the saints and to overcome them. Understand? This has been the experience of the true church in this world always. And as the Day of Christ approaches closer and closer, this war and this overcoming is going to increase. Anyone looking for the church by a measure of worldly greatness or magnificence or prosperity or size *is going to end up joining the church of the Antichrist.*

And this very thing is happening today. Worldly-minded professing Christians are ignoring the truth that the Apostle Paul wrote to Corinth –

1Co 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

1Co 2:1-5 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (3) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, (4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

What does the true church look like in this present world? It looks like Jesus – the Lamb of God who suffered and died and rose again for our justification. Let us all be certain that our faith is focused upon the Lord Jesus Christ and not upon a false Jesus and a false church. By this faith in this only Son of God we will be enabled to leave this City of Destruction and arrive safely in that Celestial City John Bunyan's pilgrim Christian entered.