

What Happened to Christians and Christianity?

Romans 12:1-2

INTRODUCTION:

This morning, we are going to deviate from our study in John, which we will do from time to time, and return to soon. Over some time now many of us have heard the echoes of an ugly church split close to our community. This past week the United Methodist lifted a ban now allowing those who identify as homosexual to be ordained as clergy. This time two years ago, the Southern Baptists put a list out of those who had supposedly been accused of sexual misconduct, and before that the accusations against many priests in the Catholic church. On the flip side, many don't participate in a local body and stand in their "high and mighty" to judge the church all the while their actions are just as horrific and unacceptable to God according to Scripture.

Today, I want to ask, "What Happened to Christians and Christianity?" I believe this is an important question to address, which I have been considering for a while and am struggling with. This does not come from a perfect human who has all the answers or has it all put together. Rather, when I interact with people, I wonder why they aren't seeing what I'm seeing, and if they are, why aren't they concerned about it as I am. Here is what I see:

- Discipleship is not the exercise of the church anymore. It's all about evangelism, and praying a "sinner's prayer," but not becoming prepared for the New World.
- Scripture has ceased to be the final authority, and we have opened Pandora's box to the trend of progressivism trying to keep up with where the world is.
- Spiritual apathy has taken over the Church and its congregations.
- There is too much self in worship and not enough Jesus.
- Church has become more about feeling good than learning to be faithful when we are feeling bad.

One of the marks of a Christian is the behavior we are to hold before the culture we are within. Yet, what I so often see from Christians makes me want to hang with the world, at least the world is being authentic to its standards even though I disagree with their standards. In a lot of cases, Christians are harder to deal with, less reliable, and less respectful than many I have dealt with who are in the “world.” It is kind of like a dog that bites, if someone tells me that dog bites, or that horse bucks, at least I know what I’m getting into, but don’t tell me they would never, then they do! Not only does it get me hurt, but it hacks me off! This is the very thing that I see people who profess Christ as Savior doing to the point when I’m doing business, if you come saddling up to me saying how Christian you are, I get suspicious. Not only fellow Christians but the world has been hurt by this fake behavior and as a result, we have taken God’s name in vain! People now, even I at times, associate negative thoughts or implications with people who claim the faith.

Listen to an excerpt from a Sunday School lesson I recently read...

“In the US today, almost seventy percent of people identify as Christian, and among teens specifically:

- *34 % attend church at least once a week.*
- *10% attend regularly, though not weekly.*
- *60% claim that religion is important to them.*

You would assume that with so many people seeing religion as important and going to church, the ethical and moral standards of our country would be more in line with the Bible. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Some want to blame our morality issues on social media, music, movies, and TV, or the opposing political party. However, the responsibility rests on us as individuals.

Across all ages, 68% of people in the US claim to be Christian, so where are ethics and morality?

The problem is not with what people believe. The problem is that too many of us don’t live what we claim to believe. There is a large disconnect between our belief system and our conduct.”

Many “Christians” are living with no integrity. When there is no integrity there is no reason to trust.

Now, we are all going to make mistakes, have our shortcomings, and need repentance, but patterns of bad, unChristlike, ungodly behavior should never form within the believer. On top of that, the body of Christ, the Church, should hold its own to a higher standard than that of the world. Accountability is unheard of in most churches because, sadly, most churches have committed idolatry over church attendance rather than being faithful in teaching people how to be disciples. If many who attend church were held “too” accountable then the church would be labeled legalistic and unloving and attendance would diminish rapidly, yet accountability is one of the most loving things we can do in the Christian community. Our accountability should be out of love, respect, and obedience to Christ.

Today, I believe with all my heart that the reason our country suffers the way it does in so much confusion and chaos, is not D.C., it’s not Republicans or Democrats, I would say it is because the Church has lost its focus, and ceased to be the Church in a lost culture. *The world is in the church rather than the church being in the world.* Now many would say, “But look at the far left and their destroying ideas!” I would agree that Marxism is not the answer, but sadly, so many Christians neglected teaching foundational values and recent world history in the home that so many young people are gravitating to this ideology. The world has evangelized the church, not the church evangelizing the world. The home of most Christians looks no different than the home of the lost.

Matthew 5:14-16

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

If we take Scripture seriously and authoritatively, this verse is clear that Christians should be different from the world. Sadly, I would propose that many people who say they are “Christians”, believing they are going to Heaven, will blow Hell wide open when they die because they are cultural Christians. This may describe many here today. They are familiar with the things of Christ up to a point. They know the Church, they know the Christian jargon, they know what to say that makes them sound spiritual, etc. It makes them masterminds of manipulation because they become good at portraying something they’re not. The Bible would simply call them liars. They come close but stop just short of being willing to be transformed because this means they have to surrender and put Christ in their place. They live as practical atheists. They would answer yes if asked, “Are you a

Christian?” But evaluate their life, and you will see no fruits of the Spirit because their priorities do not revolve around Christian things such as the Church, Scripture study, prayer....Jesus!!! They call on God when their butts are in a bind, but have no desire for personal fellowship with Him. They have no desire to fellowship with the body of Christ. They are not real followers of Jesus as their Teacher, Example, Savior, and Lord. Listen to Scripture for a moment...

Psalm 14:1

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”
They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds.
There is none who does good.

If Scripture calls an atheist a fool, what would it say about those who are great pretenders, masquerading as believers but non-believers? Well, I will tell you what it says,

II Corinthians 11:13-15

¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

Matthew 5:15-23

A Tree and Its Fruit

¹⁵ “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

I Never Knew You

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

My biggest fear in pastoring and dealing with so many believers is that many would fall into this category. Christianity is not convenient, rather it's a commitment. What I see so much of is Convenient Christianity, not Committed Christianity. Many people never get the point we talked about before of coming and dying at the feet of the Savior. I don't see a Christianity, what I call American Christianity, that has made the person who professes it uproot their life, their thinking, their priorities, their values, their character, their loves, and align them with Jesus of the Bible. Their view of Jesus is often simply the view of family, denomination, and culture, and as a result, the world looks the way it does.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

I. Do not be conformed to this world.

- A. It's a command, not a suggestion.
- B. Do not what? Be shaped by the world.
- C. Don't let the shape of your life resemble the world or its desires.

1 John 2:15-17

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

- D. How do we do that?
- E. By allowing the Holy Spirit to change and shape our appetites.

Vance Havner

We have become so subnormal as believers that when someone gets normal, we label them abnormal.

II. Be transformed.

- A. When we come to know Christ, we are born again according to John 3 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- B. A true believer who has been touched by Christ is now living a life of change from the old self to the new self, conforming no longer to the world but to Jesus.
- C. The Bible uses the word “transformation.” In the original Greek, it is the word, **μεταμορφώω**, which is where we get our English word, metamorphosis.
- to change in a manner visible to others,
 - to change inwardly in fundamental character or condition,¹
- D. The life of a disciple of Jesus is commanded not to conform to the world, but to change in a manner visible to others and inwardly in fundamental character or condition.
- E. Is this you?
- F. Many of us are ok with how we are because we simply compare ourselves to others or what we call our “old self.”
- G. We say things like “Well, I’m not like I used to be.” And for that we are glad, but our “old self” and others are not the measuring rod. Jesus is!
- H. The life of discipleship is that we are being changed through “metamorphosis” by the power of the Spirit and our willingness to surrender to the Spirit to be fitted for the New World.

¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). In [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](#) (3rd ed., p. 639). University of Chicago Press.

III. By changing how you think.

- A. As a follower of Jesus in the process of transformation, we are called to change the way we think.
- B. For some of us, thinking itself would just get us on the board. 😊
- C. But we are commanded to change the way we think.
- D. We need to learn awareness, not just of our surroundings, but the things of the kingdom.
- E. God's not ok with how we think naturally because we are selfish by nature.
- F. The number one attribute I think of a believer is humility. Many will say, "Shouldn't it be love?" Yes, it should but until we get out of the way in humility, you and I, will never love like Jesus to fulfill the command to love as He loved us.
- G. For many, our selfishness drives what we believe to be our Christianity. We have our fire insurance and now we wait for the Lord's return to take us home before this world gets too bad.
- H. Many responses will be, 'Yeah, but it's hard to change an old dog.' Who said change was easy? That's why we are commanded to do it, not suggested to do it.
- I. God wants to put His way of thinking in us so that we think like Jesus thinks.
- J. That means interpreting life through His lenses.
- K. If we are to think like Jesus, have we considered the Lord is out to use us as messengers like He did Jesus to speak truth to power?
- L. God wants us to start seeing the world as He sees it and loves it. Not agreeing with its ways, but seeing its need for a Savior.
- M. Seeing its need for truth!

N. Seeing its possibilities through repentance.

O. To think like Jesus, we must first stop thinking like us.

1 John 2:6

The one who says that he abides in him must live the same way he himself lived.

IV. For the discernment of God's will in our lives.

A. The reason some of us don't know God's will is that we don't know God.

B. Many who claim to be in Christ have no real concern for God's will, therefore, putting into question whether they know Christ at all.

C. We can't know God's will until we start thinking more like God, and this only comes through the authority of Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

D. Until Heaven, the place, ceases to be your goal for eternity, and rather Jesus is, then you won't see either. Why is Heaven, Heaven? Because Jesus is there!

E. To get God's will, you must first give up your own.

F. To understand God's will, we must come to know the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:16

For, "Who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to teach him?" But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community

"A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, which hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner."