

The Character of a Christ-Like Church

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everybody. Seems like it was a week ago that I last saw you. Time flies.

It's great to be back with you. The news, as you heard, is we closed on a house, and we're going to systematically move out of the moldy, leaky, hot, miserable townhouse to a house in Castle Rock, and we're looking forward to that.

And, yeah, it's much less. The mortgage is much less than the rent, which is good, which the guy has to get all the money he can squeeze out of us. So now the bank is, you know, they're stuck with the amount, and I guess the government will try to squeeze all the money they can with taxes, right?

That's how it goes. Been there, done that already. So we'll systematically move things, make a trip every day until we are out of there.

And so we're grateful that God has supplied us with that need. This morning we're looking at the character of a Christlike church, and it comes out of 1 Peter 4, verses 7 through 11.

[1 : 17] And one of the things that's very important to understand is that almost all the verbs in the New Testament that speak to you, when you see you, most of the time it really is y'all, okay?

It's not you personally, but all y'all. Because the way they thought back then, yeah, they were southerners, spoken southern Greek, and the way they thought had to do with not the individual, but rather the collective, the group, the people, the community.

And so what applied to one applied to all. And when we were looking at this, what he's talking about is not merely our own individual position in Christ and what we do and how we live it out in the context of the church before the face of God, but it also has to do with how we live and work and breathe together.

There is that intimate relationship, almost a symbiotic relationship, certainly with the Lord, but also with one another. And this is why we see the admonition and exhortations in Romans 12 about the gifts, and 1 Corinthians 12 about the gifts, Ephesians 4, and so forth.

So it's not just about me. It's about us. Now the question, as I brought up before in 1 Peter, the question that he is answering is, if I'm a believer, why am I suffering?

[2 : 51] Why am I going through what I'm going through? Why are people starting to pick on me? What have I done? I believe in Jesus. And so he essentially answers that.

But once again, the answer comes not merely that we are good American lone strangers doing our own thing, but rather that we are part of the body of Christ, working together as the body of Christ in our strengths and our weaknesses.

So the theme of this text is essentially glorifying God by living together as a godly community. What does that look like? Now for some Christians, that means godly community is wearing certain clothes, wearing hats or not wearing hats, wearing boots or wearing not, never sandals of course, because Jesus never wore sandals, he wore boots, right?

So we add all these conditions and ideas about what a true godly community is without reflecting upon exactly what God says about that in the godly community.

Now the context here, and it's always important to look at the context, and the context, even though we're looking at verses 7 through 11, it fits in chapter 4, which fits in all of 1 Peter, which fits in all the New Testament, which fits in the entire Bible.

[4 : 18] But here the context is he's contrasting what he mentions in verses 1 through 3 of chapter 4 about the godless world, godly community compared to the godless world.

For example, a godless world, there are lusts. But in the godly world, as a godly community, a Christlike community, there's love. In a godless world, there are orgies, where that compares to, in contrast, with hospitality.

In a godless world, there's exploitation, whereas in a godly world, a Christlike world, there is service or ministry. And in a godless world, it's all self-glorifying, whereas in a community of God's people, under Christ, it is Christ-glorifying, God-glorifying.

So he makes that contrast because he wants believers, especially new believers, who are exiting, coming out of the world because of what Christ has done, and into a new realm, a new world, a new creation, he wants to give a visual and wonderful picture of what it is like to live as a godly, Christlike community.

So that gives us now the background for this text. And let's look at, I'll read verses 7 through 11, chapter 4, 1 Peter.

[5 : 46] But the end of all things, pardon me, is at hand. In other words, it's right here. Therefore, be serious and watchful in your prayers.

And above all things, have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

If anyone speaks, let him speak, as though, as if oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for this time, this occasion of worship. And we know that you call us to this spiritual hill that we walk up and singing praises to you, honoring you.

And that we sit before your feet to hear your word that is read and now declared. That we would understand it. Once again, not merely that we would have information, but that we would, by your word, experience transformation, become more like Christ.

[7 : 07] Not only personally, not only as families, but as a body in him. Amen. Well, the first thing that we see, and the first character, quality that we see, is the right engagement with the person of God.

We see this in verse 4, 7. Verse, chapter 4, verse 7. The right engagement with the person of God. He says, everything is at a hand.

It means, literally, it's upon you. If somebody comes, you're expecting your in-laws, and, you know, it's Christmas time, let's say, and you're expecting grandma and grandpa to come, rolling up to the door, and the kids are there at the door, and they haven't come, they haven't come, and finally, you know, that you see, and they yell out, they're here, they're here, you know, because they pulled up into the driveway, and what they would say back in this day, they would say, they're at hand.

You know, they have arrived, but they're not really yet at the door, they're almost at the door, they're coming to the door, they're at hand. It's upon us. The end is near, it's upon us. And part of it, there's two parts of the end.

The part one is the Old Testament era, the Old Testament, the Old Covenant life, is coming to an end. But there's another part, of course, is that we are living in the end times, where it will gradually come to the very end, right?

[8 : 32] And that's why he says, you know, he wasn't being misleading, he really was explaining that the Old is at hand, it's done. But Jesus has arrived, and we are going to live in a new era, and that too will come to an end.

But, he said, because it is at hand, it's upon us, be of sound judgment. Be of sound judgment. meaning, prepare our mental faculties in such a way as to think God's thoughts about life.

Think the way God wants you to think in terms of the way things are in the world. Think about God's perspective when it comes to suffering.

Think about God's perspective when you're dealing with the non-believer who has nothing to do with you, or who hates you, or dealing with enemies. Think those things in a sober way, in a good way, with proper sound judgment.

Have clarity of mind about the reality of the life in which you find yourself. And then he says, be of sober spirit.

[9 : 48] Meaning, not to be inebriated in the details of life. Sometimes we can get so bogged down with life, if we get drunk with them, right? You know, to be drunk in scripture means to be controlled by another substance.

And sometimes we can be drunk with life. All the little details of life can really take us. And we can get so absorbed in all the situations and conditions with life that we are indeed drunk.

But he tells us not to be that way at all. He says, in fact, to be sober. Pardon me, to be sober. Not to be drunk in the issues of life.

Why? Well, why does he tell us this? For the purpose of prayer. Wow. He doesn't say that so we can have a great life.

He doesn't say that we can have a best life now. He doesn't say that we can do all these wonderful things because we are going to have sound judgment and sober spirit. He wants clarity of thought and he wants us not to be drunk with life, in order that we might pray well for the purpose of prayer.

[10:59] I don't know about you, but for me, prayer is hard. When I first became a Christian, it was rather easy. It was great. It was a new experience. The older I get, the, you know, I find it difficult, you know.

It's just hard to pray sometimes. Yeah. Why is that? Why is that? You know, it's easy to get caught in the trap of saying the same prayers all the time.

Not that that's not, you know, necessarily is not bad, but sometimes, you know, we just kind of tune out. We say the prayers, but our mind is thinking something else.

You know, prayer can be difficult. Essentially, what he's telling us is we cannot pray as we ought to pray, nor can we know for what we ought to pray unless we do have sound judgment and a sober spirit.

So God wants us to be intentional about our prayers, very specific about our prayers. He wants us to pray for things that we need to pray for. We need to be alert into the very things around us, but also to have the mind of God in life so that we can bring the mind of God in a very intelligent and yet spiritual way to pray about the things that are before us.

[12:15] Why does he urge us to pray? In many reasons. Matthew 26, verse 41, Jesus commands his disciples to watch, to be on guard, and to pray.

And that's what he's saying here, essentially. Paul might have been thinking that as he was led by the Spirit to write this passage, to watch and pray, to be on guard, on guard with what's going around you and praying about what's before you.

Luke 18, verse 1, we see his suffering often tempts us to lose heart. Losing heart is the beginning of our love growing cold. So God wants us to pray.

What is prayer? Well, as we know, it's engagement with God. But it's not merely engagement with God, it's really wrestling with God. I love the Old Testament picture with Jacob and the angel who we now understand is Jesus himself before he came in the flesh.

You know, where he wrestled and wrestled and wrestled. Wouldn't let him go until he was blessed. Meaning, man, I don't know, have you ever wrestled? I remember back in high school trying to wrestle.

[13:30] You know, I didn't grow up until, you know, I was like 19 or 20. Until then, I was short and tiny and thin and it was hard. You know, I had to have to wrestle these guys who were like twice my size, you know, five feet by five feet and wore, you know, 500 pounds and that was not fun.

Wrestling, you know, and that's the picture. Prayer sometimes is a wrestling match. Wrestling with God. Prayer is coming before God and like, as Jeremiah did and the Lamentations and some of the Psalms of Lament, complaining to God about these things.

Yes, we are allowed to complain. We just can't tell God what to do. But we can complain. God, I don't like what's going on. I hate what's going on. It's not more spiritual to pretend that everything is rosy and not bring your heart's desires and griefs and complaints to him.

I mean, you don't think he knows our hearts? Sure he does. He knows what we're thinking. So he wants us to wrestle with God. He wants us to bring everything to God. It is a work.

It's a discipline. And it really is the foundation of the grace of God. It's really God's divinely appointed means for accomplishing his purposes, which is really weird because we know he's providential.

[14:53] He's in charge of everything. Why does he want us to pray? Because he says he wants us to pray. And there's something about him moving in us and through us to bring about the prayers and to bring about his will through the prayers of his people.

You know, one of the most enlightening things that I learned many years ago in seminary was about the book of Revelation. And it was this simply put that as the prayers of those who are being

martyred and going through suffering went up, God's will for action came down.

When God's people prayed for justice to be done and judgment to come, God would do that on his people. And the promise is ultimate judgment will come.

In other words, prayer is not futile. Prayer is an active thing that God has given to us so that his will might be accomplished. So the first characteristic is having a right engagement with the person of God.

And it's not just again, not just us personally, but collectively as a people. And we've been called and commanded to pray. The second characteristic, the second quality, is the right exercise among the people of God.

[16:16] The right exercise among the people of God. He says, above all, in other words, this is priority one. Number one, the first thing, put it above everything else.

Above all, keep fervent in your love. Keep fervent in your love. What's very important, he says, is literally, keep on being fervent.

I like this word, fervent. Well, I like the meaning of it. I don't like the action of it. because it literally means keep on stretching yourself.

When you exercise, you're stretching those muscles. When you stretch, you're stretching, right?

And however you do your exercise, that's what he means here, is keep on being fervent, keep on stretching yourself in your love for one another.

And if you think about it, sometimes it really is a stretch to love some people, even within the church of God, especially in the church of God. true biblical Christians are known for their humble acts of loving, service, and kindness, and loving one another.

[17:39] The Tertullian, an ancient church father, Philip Rikin writes in his book, a book, he says, Tertullian tells us that in the days of the early church, pagans, non-Christian, by the way, they were called pagans by the Christians, because the majority of them lived out, it was from the word, I can't even think it's pagan, pagan, similar to pagan, it meant country folk, you know, hillbillies, and so non-Christians were considered like hillbillies, country folk.

The pagans sometimes called Christians Christiani, rather than Christiani, Christiani, or Christiani.

The two words sound similar, of course, but there was another reason for the confusion.

Christiani means Christian, but Christiani is from the Greek word for kindness. According to Tertullian, even when believers were not known as Christ people, they were known as kind people because of their love.

Now, that was a horrible, abysmal thing for people in the Roman culture, because you could not demonstrate servitude or humility without being considered the scum of the earth. That was contemptible.

You know, they would rather do anything else than to show humility before anyone else. But that was not the way of God, that was not the way of Christ.

[19:21] And therefore, they were very humble and they were very kind. And it showed in their love for other people. And it was often a complaint, as you might have heard many times, a complaint written by the governors, Roman governors, or others about these people called followers of the way, the Nazarenes, you know, who were following this Nazareth guy.

They complained because they loved one another with an intense love. They were kind. in fact, around the 300s, one of the emperors who was so disgusted by Christians, that he made an edict. And he said that all Roman people have to be kind to one another because we can't allow these Christians to gain more converts because of their kindness. It's ridiculous.

They're going around loving. It didn't work. You know, government, you know, they can never get it right. Why love?

Why love? Why does it keep on being fervent, exercising love towards one another? Well, love is self-giving. It's the sacrificial demonstration of the very goodness of God.

[20:37] Love helps in suffering, right? You think about it. Anytime that you're in suffering and you're going through suffering, what is the most refreshing things to happen? It's for somebody you know that really cares for you, comes by and ministers and serves you in some way.

Cards are nice, you know, having food is nice, but spending time with someone that you love and who loves you is refreshment beyond words.

It helps in suffering. so the necessity that as God's people continue suffering, that God's people would also continue being fervent in their love because they wrap themselves around one another

in a way that encourages their lives in Christ.

Trials can pulverize us unless by God's grace we're restored by that constant refreshment of the love from one another. But also he mentions here, here's another reason he gets it from Proverbs 10 verse 12, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

And guaranteed anytime you have people you got sins. And when you have a lot of people you have a multitude of sins and some people bring a lot of multitude of sins with them to a multitude of sins. They know how to pile it.

[21 : 59] And nevertheless God calls us that in generality, you know, in general terms what we are called to do as God's people, in our stretching with love, is just, you know, to cover it over and not make a big stink about it.

Now there are those who are stinkers who love to stink things up. And they will, you know, they'll get on your case for every little thing, but that's not what he's saying to do. It's allow love to cover over a multitude of sins.

And you know what hate does? Hate is the root of every faction and division and conflict in churches. really comes out of this hateful sin. Hate is the source of those social sins.

Granted, you know, I believe that there's mental reasons and there are mental disorders and so forth that are legitimate. it. Nevertheless, God calls us to live in love and exercise love in the midst of suffering.

Sin and hate takes what it wants, but love gives what it ought. And that's the big difference. The third character is the right expression of the people of God.

[23 : 18] The right expression of the people of God. hospitality was an Old Testament command. I've told you this before. You know, in the Old Testament, it was commanded that if a stranger or even one of your enemies was passing through your land, consider that they were doing so for decent intentions they were just going through.

and you were not to kill them. It's kind of like they were holding a white flag, you know, everything. They were safe. And what you had to do as God's people is you had to exercise hospitality. You had to offer hospitality to these people. Which meant, literally, the word means lover of strangers. So you would love the stranger by serving them.

And they didn't have Motel 6 or the Hyatt or anything like this. They had homes and houses. So if somebody was even your enemy, you know, he was one of those ite people, you know, termite or whatever, you know, and he comes knocking on your door and he needs a place to stay, you had to open it up and you had to feed him that night and you had to be kind to him and you had to make sure you weren't going to kill him, you know, give him a bed and so forth.

But the command was to offer hospitality. What's interesting is, as I said before, is that here he lays on a different condition. Something above and beyond because the woman who basically had to take care of the guest, you know, cook for him and all that, she could, she had the right to complain about it.

[24 : 58] You know, what are you doing? Why did you have to pick me? Why couldn't you pick the Jones? You know, you picked us instead. What's the matter with you? You don't like it. And I'm going to feed you.

I don't like you. I don't want you here. He goes on and on and on complaining about it. You know, that was okay. At least she was being hospitable. Right? But here, there's a different condition. Be hospitable without grumbling. Because it was the cultural thing to complain while you were being hospitable. Now, it's the biblical cultural thing not to complain and not to grumble when you're being hospitable and demonstrating a love and affection for strangers.

Now, hospitality is not having fellowship meal together. That's being hospitable, but that's not really what it means. It means engaging people that you don't even know on the basic level.

Now, you can know them in that you can still be hospitable, but it's opening up your home, having an open door policy, if you will, to others. Others within the church, of course, but others who are your neighbors, to be hospitable and do it without complaining.

[26 : 17] Hospitality, we see, is a particular responsibility to the elders and pastors, according to 1 Timothy. And here, it's a command to all believers in Christ. It's an expression of the mutual love that we have for one another and for God that we also would love our neighbors as ourselves.

There's a lot of reasons why we as Christians are not hospitable, and part of it is some of us are introverts. I won't mention my name, but others are overwhelmed, maybe overtaxed, there's so

much to do, and it's hard to do that.

It could be sin and pride, it could be ignorance, not knowing. I had a seminary classmate of mine, we were talking about this first, and he really stumped me.

Here it is, a command to be hospitable, and he said, oh, we're not going to do that. He's going to be a pastor. Called to serve and minister at church, he said, we're not going to do that.

I don't know if his wife ever, you know, went along with that, but I thought, man, you should not be a pastor, dude. I'm not going to be hospitable.

[27 : 34] But the most precious times in Okinawa, Louisiana, Artesia, California, and other, were those times where God's people were hospitable, and we were able to be hospitable, and have really rich moments of fellowship.

Some of the most desperate and lonesome times happened to be in churches where they didn't like, you know, fellowship or hospitality. It's pretty sad.

So the third characteristic is the right expression, right expression of the people of God. The fourth and last one is the right employment of the gifts of God.

The right employment of the gifts of God. There's a statistic that came out, and I doubt that it's changed much, but George Barna, I don't know if you know about him, but he's a Christian pollster. He does a lot of surveys and polls, and he writes a lot about it. He says, and this has been corroborated by other studies, in a typical organization, 20 people, 20% of the people do 80% of the work.

[28 : 46] You heard that? The Peretti principle? That really follows through. 20% of the people will do 80% of the work. You know, you've seen it. You go down I-25 and you see the workers there, right?

You got the one guy and he's working, and yeah. But what he found that was somewhat of a, maybe bothersome, is that in a typical church in the United States, less than 10% of the people do 90% of the work.

Oh, there's a lot to do. And what he's saying here is there's a right employment of the gifts of God. God has given us gifts.

This is the biblical theme in this passage of word and deed. And he says we have the gifts of serving. You know, finding out what your gift can be helpful, but the emphasis in scripture is not trying to figure out what your gift is, but rather, not the discovery, but rather the exercise of your gifts.

I like that book. I forget the name of the author who wrote it. Just do something. Meaning that God calls us to exercise ministry.

[30 : 04] And whatever it is, ultimately, you might discover in the process of serving some other people what your gift is. In the meantime, if you don't know what it is, it doesn't matter.

Serve. Serve. It's service here. The gift of serving is really the service in the context of worship together. Serving one another as good stewards or good ministers or good servants.

And, you know, what we do because of what Christ has done for us as a response, our loving response to Jesus, who moves in us by his spirit and empowers us through his word, is to serve as good stewards of the grace of God, honoring him in faithful obedience to contribute to the life of the church.

But he also says not only the gifts for service, but the gifts for speaking. He says, as oracles of God. Old Testament prophets were oracles of God. They spoke God's word to the people.

Apostles were oracles of God. Pastors preach, and that is an oracle of God. It comes from God's word. word. But here it calls us to speak to one another as if our words were God's words.

[31 : 21] And we see in other scriptures, lay aside falsehood, but speak the truth. Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth. Speak words to build up, exhort, encourage, words of thanks and appreciation, words that teach.

church. You see? So he gives us this within the context of what we do and worship and body life as we say. He gives us gifts for speaking.

So we have the four basic characteristics of a Christ-like church. And then he concludes, the right end is for the glory of God.

All of this for the glory of God. Everything that is done is for God's glory. Our prayers, our being watchful, having fervent love for each other, being hospitable, receiving gifts and service and so forth.

All of that is ultimately for the glory of God. So we have the right engagement with the person of God, the right exercise among the people of God, the right expression to the people of God, right employment of the gifts of God, and finally, it's the right end is the glory of God.

[32 : 40] It's all for him. Father, thank you that by the work of Jesus, the God who became man, who came for us, to save us sinners, to call us into himself, to be united in Christ, and to live as his body on earth, suffering as he suffered and nevertheless living as he lived.

We know that these things you call us to do are impossible to do without the ministry of your word and your spirit in us. So grant this church, grant us the wherewithal and the ability and the understanding to live out what it means to have the characteristics of a Christlike church. All for your glory, we pray. Amen. Amen.