

“Insiders, Outsiders”
by Rom A. Pegram (7/22/18)

We’re moving into the 3rd part of our ‘Christian’ series today, where we’ve been talking specifically about the word ‘Christian’—what it means and doesn’t mean. And we’ve learned together that the word Christian is a bit ambiguous—only mentioned 3 times in the NT, nobody ever really defining it, so you can basically make this word mean whatever you want it to mean! That’s why there are ‘Christians’ on every side of every issue; even though you’re ‘Christian’ and believe similar things, it just doesn’t seem to make much difference in many cases. And the reason, folks, is the word—manufactured originally by those outside the Body of Christ ... to negatively label those who were a part of the Body of Christ...

BUT, the term Jesus used to tag his followers was what? Do you remember? Disciples! This was the term followers of Christ used to describe themselves. And this word, as we’ve said in weeks past, is clearly defined in scripture! You can be a Christian and believe just about anything. You can be a Christian and adopt any kind of lifestyle, and if anyone challenges you, you can say “Whoa. Whoa. I’m a Christian.” And you can tell them things you believe...

BUT, the difference between a Christian and a disciple is simply this: *Christian oftentimes is all about what a person believes; Disciple is all about what a person actually does!* Now, however you would label yourself today, if you’re one who goes to church regularly, something you need to know is this: *the people who aren’t followers of Jesus, who don’t consider themselves Christians, look at us and sometimes expect more of us than we expect of ourselves!* They look at many who claim, “I’m a Christian. I’m a Christian!” and they say, “Yeah, but you don’t look like Jesus, you don’t look like Jesus, you don’t look like Jesus!” So there’s the rub! It’s the very reason why many aren’t involved in churches ... because they’re like: “Okay, forget Christian! Why don’t you act more like Jesus?” We saw that through author Anne Rice’s story last week...

Well, that’s where we’ve been, but today we’re going to switch gears. For *the next couple of weeks*, we’re going to be talking specifically about ‘how Jesus-followers should treat people who aren’t Jesus-followers’. We’re going to begin to talk about how we’re to respond or how we’re to act toward people *outside* the faith. *And if you’re one who doesn’t consider yourself to be a Jesus-follower, you’re probably going to love this!* But if you *ARE* a Jesus follower, what we learn together today may make you a bit uncomfortable—not always a bad thing... Let’s get started, shall we?

To begin our discussion, we’ve got to go back to something else Jesus said as he left the earth, because he gives us our marching orders ... and that kind of sets the direction for what we want to talk about today. So, folks, here’s #1...

Right before Jesus exited, he left his disciples/followers with specific instructions. Many of us grew up knowing this as ‘The Great Commission’ and it comes from the very end of Matthew, Chapter 28, and verse 19 (NIV): “Therefore go

and make *disciples* [italics mine]....” There’s our word, isn’t it? Isn’t it interesting that he didn’t say, *Go make Christians?* Jesus said, I want you to go and I want you to cause people to become my followers, my learners, my pupils...

Let me go on with Matthew 28: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” So, folks, this is what the Church originally did, developing these little ‘ekklesias’, these little Jesus communities; they began to teach in such a way that people were drawn to and became followers of Jesus; and it grew and grew and grew ... for the first 300 years...

After 300 years, something changed. An emperor by the name of Constantine not only made Christianity legal, but adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Now, you’d think this would be a good thing, but think again...

Now, to explain the change that took place, I need to say this: *Anytime followers of Jesus leverage anything other than love [repeat this about 3x] ... we go backward, not forward! Why? Because Jesus said ‘by this all men will know you’re my followers, by how you love one another.’* But once Christianity was made legal ... and the official religion of the emperor, they now had the power. And once the Church got the power, they decided ‘we’re not going to leverage love anymore. We’ll leverage some other things.’ And so the Church got in control ... and the Great Commission began to sound more like this:

Therefore go and impose my teachings, values and worldview on all nations, threatening them with judgment and destruction if they don’t do everything I have commanded you.

That, folks, is the message of a group that has the power; that’s the message of a group that’s in control. But, that was *not* the message of Jesus, *nor* the message of the NT!

The fact is the Church grew in the first 300 years because it was all about LOVE ... and it was all about ‘winning’ people to Christ. After the change under Emperor Constantine, it was no longer about winning people out of love; rather *it was about imposing something on people ... or else!* But, that’s not right, is it? Fortunately, there’s a better way ... and it looks like this:

New Testament believers opted for WIN. Folks, the Apostle Paul is the ultimate example of this, because when Jesus exits, the Apostle Paul decides, ‘Hey, I’m going to go into the non-Jewish world and explain to them that God’s done something incredible for them’ ... winning those who have no interest in Jesus ... to Jesus himself! And do you know what approach he took? Here it is: 1 Corinthians 9:19 (NIV) says, “Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave [servant] to everyone [in other words, ‘I don’t power up; I don’t get judgmental; I don’t get all high and mighty; I’ve made myself a slave/servant to everyone.’ And then here’s this phrase:] to win as many as possible.” So, Paul is basically saying here: ‘I become a Jew to the Jews ... to win as

many as possible; I become like a Gentile to the Gentiles to win as many as possible.’ Paul, what are you trying to do? *I’m trying to win as many as possible...* Why? Because that’s what Jesus told us to do...

Have you ever won a contract—close a sales deal or something? Or have you ever won a heart—those of you who’ve had serious relationships? How did you do that? I know... If it was a contract, it was because you convinced the other person the product or service you were selling would be what’s best for them. If it was another person’s heart, it was because you made YOU the most attractive choice (*and that wasn’t easy for some of us*)! You didn’t win anything or anyone by imposing your will; you only win when you convince others that there’s a better way. And you don’t coerce them; you love them ... and treat them right!

Again, the first 300 years, LOVE was the approach that everyone took; that was the only approach the Church had. But then, somewhere along the line, they decided ‘we’re not going to leverage love anymore. We’re going to leverage power; we’re going to leverage our authority; we’re going to go from winning to threatening; we’re going to go from *God is love* to *God’s going to get you!*’ And, again, whenever the Church goes from leveraging anything other than love, we go backwards, every single time ... and some of that, needless to say, still continues today. So, because our approach to ‘winning’ is so terrible sometimes, we need Paul to give us a good approach and he does in 1 Corinthians 5. Let me set this up a bit...

Just so you know, the Apostle Paul actually wrote 4 letters to the Corinthian church. 2 of the 4 disappeared in the 1st century, so all we have left is what we call 1 & 2 Corinthians. Earlier Paul went to Corinth. Corinth, in Paul’s day, was like Las Vegas today; you know, ‘what said in Corinth ... stays in Corinth!’ It was a rather immoral place—a party city; it was a port city too, about 50 miles SW of Athens. So, the ancient city of Corinth was very, very pagan AND very, very carnal. And it’s there that Paul goes and starts a little Jesus community, teaching them the ways of Jesus. BUT, they’re surrounded by a culture that is just not going to have any of that Jesus stuff...

So, Paul would write them letters of encouragement, because in a culture like Corinth, where these new believers lived, it wasn’t an easy thing to do ... to change their ways AND to still live in the midst of a culture that promotes their old ways. And one time, Paul received word that there was some really, really nasty stuff going on in the new church he planted there. I mean, he gets word that something’s going on there that even those outside the church think, ‘This is soooooooo not right!’ And in dealing with this issue, Paul gives us some insight into how Jesus disciples are to respond to people who are NOT Jesus disciples—those on the outside. So, here’s how the story begins...

1 Corinthians 5:1 (NIV): “It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans....”

What in the world are we talking about? What could be that bad ... that not even those who have no morals would be a part of? This is what Paul had to address, so let's go on...

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (NIV): "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife.² And you are proud!"

Now, we don't think this guy was sleeping with his mom, or I think Paul would have said that; what he was talking about, probably (though we don't know for sure), is there was a guy in the church, whose mother had died, perhaps, or maybe his parents had divorced, and when his dad remarried ... somewhere along the line this guy hooked up with his dad's wife or ex-wife. Either way, it didn't fit into anybody's standard of what was proper ... including those outside the church! Even those outside the Church were going, 'That's just wrong!'

Now, to the best of our knowledge, the Church in Corinth wasn't a big church at this time—maybe 50 people or so, more like a large small group; in other words, everybody knew everybody! It wasn't like they were so big that no one really knew what was going on; so this is what got to Paul, and he goes on...

1 Corinthians 5:2 (NIV): "...Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?"

In other words, shouldn't you have addressed this? And he goes on...

1 Corinthians 5:3 (NIV): "Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And [*check this out, folks*] I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present."

'O.K., hold on Paul! Doesn't the Bible teach us that we're *not* supposed to judge others?' To which Paul would say, 'I'm writing the Bible, thank you. This IS the Bible.'

Folks, let me be blunt today; scripturally speaking, the guidelines for those inside the Church and those outside the Church are very, very different. Paul instructs the church at Corinth to 'put this guy out!' Why? Let me explain briefly: 'Because this guy—the one who's sleeping with his father's wife—is inside the Church. He's a follower of Jesus. He has signed on to be a 'disciple', but now his behavior is way out of step with Jesus followers. In fact, the non-Jesus followers (those on the outside of the church) are laughing! So, Paul uses a legal term here when he goes on—kind of like turning this guy over to a parole officer. Here's what Paul goes on to say...

1 Corinthians 5:5 (NIV): "...hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

Not 'go to hell', but let's discipline him, put him out for now, so that he can work through this, realize the error of his ways, and come back to us as soon as possible! So, how are we to respond to those on the outside? Listen (v.9ff):

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 (NIV): "I have written you in my letter [*one we lost*] not to associate with sexually immoral people-- ¹⁰ not at all meaning the people of this world [*those outside the Jesus community*] who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹ But now I am writing you [*Paul wants to make sure we know what he's talking about*] that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother [*or sister*] but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.¹² What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³ God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

So, Paul is basically saying 'let's make sure you've got this: You're supposed to judge the people on the inside [hold one another accountable in love], but you don't have any business judging those on the outside [as they are God's business only!]." He used the 'J' word, didn't he? So maybe the Bible doesn't teach what we thought it taught about judging; maybe there's different guidelines for those who are disciples and those who are not ... and from the viewpoint of those on the *outside*...

When we get this right, our lives serve as continual invitations. Those outside will no longer feel threatened, or judged, but hopefully won ... out of love!

Here's a silly way that Andy Stanley came up with to remember what the Bible really teaches those of us who are disciples about how to treat those who are not yet disciples: *Judge the believin' ... not the heathen!* In other words, we need to quit policing those on the outside for their behavior, and start holding ourselves accountable for being disciples of Jesus—for our behavior. Are we loving in this way? That's what Paul taught. That's what the Bible teaches. And that's one more way we need to LOVE; *love one another & stop judging those on the outside*...