

Series: *Remembering the Reformation*

Title: "The Sad State of Today's Church" (2 Corinthians 11:1-4)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 11/9/2019

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Let me call your attention this evening to the inspired words of the Apostle Paul that we find in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church. Second Corinthians chapter 11, beginning at verse one. Second Corinthians chapter 11, beginning at verse one. Let us here the inspired, infallible, inerrant word of the Lord:

Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

When I saw that the series of services we began yesterday was going to be called a "Reformation Celebration," that in itself gave me cause for thought. We certainly commemorate the Protestant Reformation that took place 500 years ago. Praise God that the spiritual darkness of Roman Catholicism, the spiritual darkness of that mixture of Christianity and ancient paganism, was once and for all exposed by the power of God and the bright light of Scripture. Praise God that a portion of the visible church was freed from that Satanic bondage. Praise God for men and women who have held on to the heritage during the past 500 years.

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## **Little to Celebrate, Much to Disturb**

But as we look at the state of what is called the Evangelical church in our time, as we look at the state of what is called the Reformed church in our time, I submit to you that today we find little to celebrate, and much to disturb us. With few and precious exceptions, the nominally Evangelical church, the nominally Reformed church, has forgotten what it means to be Protestant. Yesterday morning we spoke of what it means to be a Protestant. This evening I would like to focus our attention, with the passage before us as our theological anchor point, on the phenomenon that we find far and wide today, and that is the phenomenon of the un-Protestant church.

But let me also mention were we will be going after this, the Lord willing, in the messages to follow. As we continue I want to focus our attention on the question, "How should we respond to all of this?" How should we, individually, respond to it? How should we, as Christ's church, respond to it?

In order to answer that question, I want to call our attention to a passage from the Psalms that was clearly on Martin Luther's heart as he went on trial for his beliefs, indeed, went on trial for his life, three and a half years after he nailed his 95 theses, his 95 questions, to the church door at Wittenberg. That will be tomorrow evening, the Lord willing.

And then in the messages to follow I would like to call our attention to the fact that in the history of the New Testament and in the church over the last 2,000

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years, we find that God deals through remnants. Faithful remnants. That is His way. God deal powerfully through remnants, comparatively small groups of people. And so on Wednesday evening I want to call our attention to the very beginning of the New Testament church in the first chapter of Acts. And I also want to call our attention to a modern-day example of Reformation. It began with God's calling of a single man. That man's ministry revolutionized a local church. The testimony of that church in turn revolutionized an entire city. And as that testimony spread, it saved an entire nation from falling into the domination of godless Communism. So I hope you will be able to attend those remaining services.

### **The Picture at Corinth**

But let us now focus our attention on the passage before us. Much of the church today has fallen into the pattern that we find in the church at Corinth in the time of the Apostle Paul.

Corinth was a great city, a commercial crossroads city in the Roman Empire. People of practically every nationality in the Empire could be found living and doing business in Corinth. Every kind of pagan religion had its adherents among the people of Corinth. You could find every kind of pagan philosophy imaginable in Corinth. You could also find every kind of immorality imaginable in Corinth.

The Corinthian church had begun in this very adverse environment. But the Corinthian church had begun well. We read in the 18th and 19th chapters of the

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book of Acts that the Apostle Paul helped to found the church at Corinth. We read in Acts 18 beginning and verse 9 that the Lord spoke

to Paul in the night by a vision [and said], Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:9-10)

But soon after Paul left Corinth, a downgrade began. The Colossians began to mingle elements of the false religions with Christianity. They began to bring in elements of the pagan worldly philosophies that prevailed around them. They were, in effect, attempting to make peace with the darkness out of which they had come. They were attempting to cultivate an atmosphere of coexistence with that which God condemns. And the results were disastrous, and it happened rapidly.

The worst kind of immorality was tolerated within the church. The Lord's Supper was abused. Preacher worship and factionalism developed. Worldly elements were introduced into the worship of the church. There were serious misunderstandings about the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts. And there was a serious lack of love, agape love, self-sacrificial love. There was an epidemic of spiritual pride. There was a serious lack of spiritual maturity in all respects among the members of the church at Corinth.

And so the Apostle Paul, when he found out about these things, wrote his two

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letters to the church at Corinth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to warn the church, to reprove and rebuke the church, and to correct the church. He began by saying to the church, in effect, "You have forgotten what it means to be Christians. You have forgotten what it means to be set apart from the world and its systems and its ways."

And that is the context of the words that we read from first Corinthians chapter 11 a few moments ago. Paul feared for these people. He feared for their spiritual lives.

He feared that some may have departed permanently from the faith, and gone after another Jesus who is not the authentic Jesus, another spirit that is not the Spirit of God but the spirit of Antichrist, and another gospel which is not the one true Gospel that proclaims eternal deliverance from the bondage of sin by the new birth, by the shed blood of Christ alone.

### **Godly Jealousy**

And so Paul said, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Dear friends, I submit to you that as we commemorate the Protestant Reformation of 500 years ago, we need to remember that the great Reformers, as

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the Spirit of God enlightened their hearts, these men began to have this same kind of heart for the church. The same kind of godly, protective jealousy. The same kind of godly fear for the spiritual condition and the spiritual destiny of the people.

And I submit to you that as we commemorate the Protestant Reformation we need to take a clear-eyed, Scripture-driven look at the state of the church, the nominally Evangelical church, the nominally Reformed church, with the same godly jealousy for the defense of the true faith, with the same godly fear for the general condition of the church.

And we must not merely look outward. We must examine ourselves as well. In fact we must examine ourselves first. And we must examine ourselves against the only infallible standard of revealed truth, the Word of God alone.

### **The Picture Today**

What is the state of the nominally Evangelical church today, the state of the nominally Reformed church today? Let me submit for your consideration several things.

First of all, we hardly ever hear the word Protestant in the church today. With few and precious exceptions, the nominally Evangelical church and even many in the nominally Reformed church have become uncomfortable with and even ashamed of the term.

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Many today simply do not understand what the term even means. And among those who do have some inkling of what it means, especially among the leadership in many churches and many nominally Christian institutions today, there is a desire to suppress the term Protestant. Many today are uncomfortable with the term because they fear it may offend someone.

And some today, growing numbers today, consider the term Protestant to be a badge of dishonor because they believe the Protestant Reformation was a mistake. Growing numbers see no reason why we cannot cooperate with Rome. Growing numbers see no reason why we cannot cooperate even with what they mistakenly refer to as the peaceful elements of Islam.

### **God Always Deals In Remnants**

But dear friends, as we look at history in Scripture, as we look at the history of the people of God prior to the establishment of the nation of Israel, as we look at the nation of Israel itself, as we look at the establishment of the New Testament church, and then as we look at the church over the 2000 years since the cross, we find this common principle: God always deals in remnants.

God's people have never been a majority. They never will be. It is the nature of true saving faith that it is a Narrow Way, Jesus said, and few there be that find it. The vast majority are entering in by the broad gate that leads to destruction. God always works with and deals through remnants. God deals powerfully through

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remnants. And we're going to focus on that, the Lord willing, in more detail in a later message in our time together.

### **The Church Unplugged, Uncertain, Ineffectual**

But why is it that we live in a time of the Un-Protestant church? And that is what I believe we must honestly call it in our day, the Un-Protestant church.

Why does the present-day Evangelical church seem increasingly ineffectual, while societies deteriorate around the globe, and aggressive Islam, resurgent Roman Catholicism, secular humanism, and the New Atheism, and a growing number of spiritual plagues within churches that were once sound, while all of these things are happening, why is it that the present-day Evangelical church seems increasingly ineffectual, impotent?

I believe that the answer is quite straightforward. We see it as we look at the example of the Corinthian church. We see it in the history of lengthening periods of apostasy interspersed with short periods of Reformation and revival within the nation of Israel in the Old Testament. We see the same pattern in our own time. With few and precious exceptions, today three things characterize the nominally Evangelical and Reformed churches.

First of all, as we saw yesterday morning, the church today is the church unplugged. The church today is increasingly disconnected from the only source of truth and authority, the Word of God.

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Secondly, the church unplugged from the Word of God is the church uncertain. The church unsure of what it believes, the church unable to articulate and defend even the court truths of the Christian faith.

And thirdly, the church unplugged from the Word of God, and the church uncertain of what it believes, has become the church ineffectual. Un-armed and un-armored for spiritual warfare against the enemies of truth, and unprepared to carry out Christ's Great Commission to evangelize the world and edify the saints.

Now I realize that this is quite an indictment of the church in our time. But with few and precious exceptions, it is true. It is true of churches. It is increasingly true of Christian colleges and seminaries. Many of them were once on fire for God and self-consciously Protestant, but in many cases have grown lukewarm and cold and are self-consciously seeking compromise with the world and even with false religions.

Compelling evidence supports the picture that I have just presented. And it also points to the solution.

Let me briefly give you some of the evidence that supports the three points of this indictment of much of the church in our time.

### **The Greatest Story Never Read**

According to reliable surveys, in self-described Bible-believing churches today, only one adult out of every six reads the Bible even once or twice a week outside

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of a church service. And many of them aren't even reading the Bible in a church service, because Scripture reading and expository preaching have been crowded out by entertainment.

More than one third of the members of Bible believing churches today never read the Bible outside of a church service. One commentator put it this way: He said that "among Evangelicals, the Bible has become the Greatest Story Never Read."

Now that may sound unbelievable. But it is not unbelievable when we consider the fact that systematic, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, expository preaching of the Word of God has mostly disappeared from Evangelical pulpits.

Biblical preaching has given way to a topical approach that is geared toward the felt needs of the audience. Look at most televised church programs today. Visit most nominally Evangelical churches in any area today, and this is what you will find.

The church that follows this pattern is unplugged from its source of authority and power, the holy Scriptures. It has fallen into a deadly trap. When the church neglects the Bible, it creates a spiritual vacuum.

And what is true in nature is also true in spiritual matters. It is true in the church. Nature abhors a vacuum. And in the church, the worldly mind set rushes in to fill that vacuum. Man, not God, becomes the source of authority. And as a

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result, man's word, not God's Word, shapes the church's agenda.

If a church does not teach the Word of God, it teaches the thinking of the world. There is no third alternative. That was the problem at Corinth. And that is the problem in much of the church today.

**[To be continued on the next broadcast]**

#### **About the Broadcast**

*The Scripture-Driven Church* airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to obey Christ's Great Commission: preaching the Gospel to all, and equipping believers in Christ to live every area of life by the sole authority of Scripture, to the glory of our Lord and Savior.

For more information, please visit our website, [www.teachingtheword.org](http://www.teachingtheword.org).

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**May the Lord richly bless your personal study  
of His inspired, infallible, inerrant Word.**

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