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Sermon Notes

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Christ and Culture: Facing the Hardest Issues of Our Day

BFL Class #1

I. Understanding Our Times

A. The Decaying Orbit of America's Esteem for Christianity

1. In 1892, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled on a case ("Church of the Holy Trinity v. the United States"); Associate Justice David J. Brewer (1837-1910) wrote the majority decision using these words

"Nor are we bound by any expressions in the Constitution, as some have strangely supposed, either not to punish at all, or to punish indiscriminately the like attacks upon the religion of Mahomet or of the Grand Lama, and for this plain reason, that **the case assumes that we are a Christian people, and the morality of the country is deeply engrafted upon Christianity**, and not upon the doctrines or worship of those impostors. ...

If we pass beyond these matters to a view of American life, as expressed by its laws, its business, its customs, and its society, we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth. Among other matters, note the following: the form of oath universally prevailing, concluding with an appeal to the Almighty; the custom of opening sessions of all deliberative bodies and most conventions with prayer; the prefatory words of all wills, 'In the name of God, amen'; the laws respecting the observance of the Sabbath, with the general cessation of all secular business, and the closing of courts, legislatures, and other similar public assemblies on that day; the churches and church organizations which abound in every city, town, and hamlet; the multitude of charitable organizations existing everywhere under Christian auspices; the gigantic missionary associations, with general support, and aiming to establish Christian missions in every quarter of the globe. These, and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that **this is a Christian nation.**"

2. Justice Brewer later explained his statement more fully:

“But in what sense can it be called a Christian nation? Not in the sense that Christianity is the established religion or that people are in any matter compelled to support it. On the contrary, the Constitution specifically provides that ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.’ Neither is it Christian in the sense that all of its citizens are either in fact or name Christian. On the contrary, all religions have free scope within our borders. Numbers of our people profess other religions, and many reject all. Nor is it Christian in the sense that a profession of Christianity is a condition of holding office or otherwise engaging in public service, or essential to recognition either politically or socially. In fact, the government as a legal organization is independent of all religions. Nevertheless, we constantly speak of this republic as a Christian Nation—in fact, as the leading Christian Nation of the world. This popular use of the term certainly has significance. It is not a mere creation of the imagination. It is not a term of derision but has substantial basis—one which justifies its use.” [Brewer, *The United States: A Christian Nation*, 1905]

3. The open declaration of many Presidents

The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were. . . . the general principles of Christianity. **JOHN ADAMS**

[T]he teachings of the Bible are so interwoven and entwined with our whole civic and social life that it would be literally....impossible for us to figure to ourselves what that life would be if these teaching were removed. **TEDDY ROOSEVELT**

America was born a Christian nation – America was born to exemplify that devotion to the elements of righteousness which are derived from the revelations of Holy Scripture. **WOODROW WILSON**

American life is builded, and can alone survive, upon . . . [the] fundamental philosophy announced by the Savior nineteen centuries ago. **HERBERT HOOVER**

This is a Christian Nation. **HARRY TRUMAN**

Let us remember that as a Christian nation . . . we have a charge and a destiny. **RICHARD NIXON**

[see <https://wallbuilders.com/america-christian-nation/> for footnotes]

4. For us as American Christians, we need to understand these assertions in a limited sense, as Justice Brewer made clear... our citizenship and allegiance to the United States of America is a temporary, earthly condition. Paul made this plain statement (as a Roman citizen!):

Philippians 3:20-21 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

5. However, we need to see how far the public discourse has degenerated from such open assertions of faith in God and in the primacy of Christianity and the Bible
6. More and more commonly, Bible-believing Christians are denigrated and insulted for their views
7. Furthermore, sometimes Christians are brought to trial for not adhering to some legislation concerning LGBTQ issues or other ethical issues popular in our culture... like photographers or bakers who are sued for not offering their services to “gay weddings”; or Hobby Lobby refusing to submit to laws on offering contraception to its employees
8. The level of disdain for Christians is rising

B. David French on Anti-Christian Bigotry

1. French is a senior writer for *National Review*
2. Wrote an article on January 31, 2019 entitled, “This is What Anti-Christian Bigotry Looks Like”
3. Zeroes in on the battle for free speech and free exercise of religion

“The first thing you have to understand about the battle for free speech, religious freedom, and freedom of association in this nation is that it is primarily *cultural*, not legal. From a First Amendment perspective, legal protection against government censorship and government repression is at or near an all-time high. The First Amendment has never been more robust. Panic over court decisions is mainly panic at the margins, whether key decisions and doctrines will be undermined, not discarded entirely. At the same time, however, talk to virtually any social conservative — especially a Christian conservative — and they will tell you that they feel free less free to speak and to exercise their religion

now than they did five years ago, or ten years ago, or 20 years ago. Why? Because of cultural shunning. Because of cultural shaming.”

4. Issue: Immanuel Christian School in Virginia

- a. Karen Pence, Vice President Mike Pence’s wife, took a job there; it became known to the national mainstream media that the school has a statement on upholding orthodox Christian teaching about sexuality—sex is reserved for marriage, and that marriage is defined as the union of a man and a woman
- b. A frenzied media explosion occurred afterward in which there was a movement to expose the abuse of Christian schools like this one...
- c. As a result, a local private academy named the Sheridan School decided to prohibit its sports teams from playing games at Immanuel
- d. They said they felt “unsafe”

Here is the key paragraph from Sheridan School’s officials:

“Since the majority of students wanted to play, we were initially planning to go to ICS with the student-athletes wearing a statement of support (such as rainbow socks or warm-up jerseys). As we talked more, we understood that *some students did not feel safe entering a school that bans LGBTQ parents, students or even families that support LGBTQ rights*. Forcing our children to choose between an environment in which they feel unsafe or staying home was not an option. So we decided that we would invite ICS to play all of the games at Sheridan. Since ICS declined our offer to host, we will only play our home games and will not go to ICS to play.” [Emphasis added]

5. David French’s Call

“It’s time for Christian parents, pastors, and politicians to understand a simple fact — in the fight for religious freedom, we often focus our efforts on the less important battleground. Legal protections matter less and less when the culture drifts so far from Christianity that shunning, shaming, and exclusion become the norm. Stay silent to keep your job. Change your policies to keep your educational opportunities. Say nothing so that you’ll preserve your public reputation. And in this more-important cultural fight, it’s critical to wrap our arms around principles, not politicians. There’s not one darn thing that even the president can or should do to force the Sheridan school to associate with the kids from Immanuel.

Combatting intolerance is a matter of persuasion, and it depends on Christians exercising a degree of personal courage and resolve — if you feel pressure at work, speak anyway. If you see a colleague facing persecution for his beliefs, stand with him. If a Christian school faces public shame and public sanction for its fidelity to Scripture, send your kids anyway. Silence and compliance only embolden those who seek to sideline Christian thought and belief. Those who seek to censor and exclude have no reluctance to express their loathing for traditional Christianity. Christians must be equally willing to speak the truth and defend their faith. Otherwise, fear and shame will do what censorship cannot — drive the Christian faith from America’s public square.”

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/01/this-is-what-anti-christian-bigotry-looks-like/>

6. This gives a sense of how America’s culture is turning away from biblical Christianity
7. Not to mention the simple statistics of the increasing number of “Nones” (those who answer polls on religious affiliation with “None” as the answer... atheists, agnostics, pagans, unaffiliated)

C. Ever-Increasing Wickedness

1. Immorality and sexual depravity is more and more celebrated
2. Pro-abortion advocates are becoming bolder and bolder about late-term abortions which are little different than infanticide
3. Popular culture celebrates profanity, bold rebellion, “creative diversity” in ways that would have been seen with shock 50 years ago.

D. Highly Polarized “Culture Wars”

1. The election of Donald Trump to the White House has greatly accelerated this polarization
2. The Democratic Party itself has become more and more hostile to Christianity and all mentions of God or the Bible
 - a. E.g. on Easter Sunday, April 21 of this year, Sri Lanka suffered a devastating series of mass bombings that resulted in almost 300 casualties
 - b. The attack was carried out by a radical Islamic terrorist organization with ties to ISIS, who later claimed responsibility and said it was a reprisal for

the March attack on a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand in which over 50 people died

- c. The whole world mourned this attack in Sri Lanka, including President Trump, who highlighted that this was violence against Christians on their holiest day of the year
- d. BUT the Democratic Party leaders, led by Barack Obama, used a curious phrase: “Easter worshipers of Sri Lanka”: (not Christians!) Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi followed the same curious word choice
- e. What is so offensive is these same leaders openly spoke of Muslim worshipers in Christchurch back in March, speaking of “the murder of Muslims”... they were not called “Ramadan worshipers”
- f. On Saturday, August 24, 2019, the Democratic National Committee passed a resolution calling on its Party to be more inclusive... that resolution included this verbiage:

Those most loudly claiming that morals, values, and patriotism must be defined by their particular religious views have used those religious views, with misplaced claims of “religious liberty,” to justify public policy that has threatened the civil rights and liberties of many Americans, including but not limited to the LGBT community, women, and ethnic and religious/nonreligious minorities ...

3. Yet American Christians in the last Presidential election were deeply conflicted about voting for a man who seems the most irreligious conservative candidate ever, with various incidents that have deeply offended the moral sensibilities of many strongly committed Christians
4. The “Culture War” seems like its only going to get hotter

E. Specific “Hot Button” Issues

1. The Exclusivity of Christ
2. The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible
3. Abortion/Sanctity of Human Life
4. End of Life Issues
5. Sexual Immorality
6. LGBTQ
7. Feminism/Gender-Based Roles

8. The Significance/Definition of Gender (Transgender issues)
9. Race Relations/ “Social” Justice/Wealth Distribution
10. Freedom of Speech
11. Intersectionality/Identity Politics

F. The LGBTQ Strategy

1. Barr and Citlau (*Compassion Without Compromise*, p. 138-9) show how the gay right movement has changed strategies
2. From 1969-1989, the activists were angry, defiant, shouting slogans, carrying signs, defiling Catholic churches; ACT-UP was the most radical and well known for these tactics
3. “The Overhauling of Straight America” and later released as a book, *After the Ball...* reframed the entire movement...rejecting the antiwar-style of radical demonstrations for a more savvy, market-friendly approach
4. Incredibly successful!
5. Key culture-creating organs recruited and wholeheartedly on-board: media/arts, education, government
 - a. Use sit-coms to portray gays as intelligent, sympathetic figures
 - b. Use college campuses to force students to accept LGBT agenda in key ways
 - c. Use government regulations in armed services and other agencies to advance the agenda
6. Central strategy: turn the tables!! Take the “moral high ground” by likening the battle for LGBTQ issues to the Civil Rights Era
7. Stages
 - a. Stage I: gain sympathy (mission accomplished)
 - b. Stage II: achieve normalcy (mission accomplished)
 - c. Stage III: demonize, ridicule, marginalize, ostracize, and eventually punish the opposers (in process)

G. College Campuses

1. Anti-free-speech; campus organizer against conservative Ben Shapiro openly asserted that Shapiro should not be permitted to speak, or voice his views, and that the First Amendment (defending freedom of speech) is obsolete and irrelevant; people like this organizer openly say that physical violence against people who are hurting their minds with false teachings is justified!!
2. Richard Rorty

Richard Rorty, former philosophy professor at Princeton University – to parents of Christian college students:

“ . . . we try to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic, religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own ... we do our best to convince these students of the benefits of secularization. We assign first-person accounts of growing up homosexual to our homophobic students for the same reasons that German schoolteachers in the postwar period assigned *The Diary of Anne Frank*... You have to be educated in order to be ... a participant in our conversation ... So we are going to go right on trying to discredit you in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable. We are not so inclusivist as to tolerate intolerance such as yours ... I think those students are lucky to find themselves under the benevolent Herrschaft [domination] of people like me, and to have escaped the grip of their frightening, vicious, dangerous parents ...”

II. Our Proper Relationship to the World: Key Texts

A. “The World” = Satan’s World System of Lies and Opposition to God and Christ

1 John 2:16 For everything in the world—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

Called “Babylon the Great” in the Book of Revelation

Revelation 14:8 A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

B. We Started in “the World”

Ephesians 2:1-3 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our

sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

C. Christ Rescued Us Out of the World

John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

John 17:6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.

Colossians 1:13-14 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

D. Jesus Wants Us to Stay in the World to Be His Witnesses and to be “Salt and Light”

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The centerpiece and top priority of this witness is the gospel:

Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Matthew 5:13-16 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Salt and light implies a strong positive effect on the surrounding world, retarding the spread of evil.

E. The World is Mixed Up with Both Believers and Non-Believers; Some of the Non-Believers are Unconverted Elect

1. Christ told a parable of the Wheat and the Weeds... all mixed together in one field (Matthew 13:24-30)
2. There is no way to root out the weeds without also ripping up the wheat
3. Both must be allowed to grow up until the harvest at the end of the age

Matthew 13:28-30 *"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?'*
²⁹ *"No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'"*

4. Unconverted elect look and act just like the reprobate... think of Saul of Tarsus, the thief on the cross, Rahab the prostitute, and King Nebuchadnezzar

F. Our Struggle is Truly Against People, But Against Satan and Demons

Ephesians 6:10-13 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.*

G. Our Battle is With Ideas, False Doctrines

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 *For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

H. The World With Its Lusts is a Great Danger to Our Souls

1 John 2:15-17 *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the boastful pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! ¹³ No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

I. We Are Commanded to Keep Pure from the World

James 4:4 *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

J. Jesus Prays Continually to the Father for Our Spiritual Protection

John 17:11 I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name-- the name you gave me-- so that they may be one as we are one.

John 17:14-17 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

K. We Should Expect to Suffer and Be Persecuted in this World, in Proportion to Our Faithfulness to Christ

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

John 15:19-20 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

1 John 3:13 Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

1 Peter 4:12-13 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

III. Methodology With Outsiders

A. Sufficiency of the Bible

Jeremiah 23:29 "Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

B. Speaking the Truth in Love

Ephesians 4:15 speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

C. Destroying Arguments, Not People

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the

contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

D. Boldness Like a Lion

Proverbs 28:1 The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

E. Centrality of the Gospel

1 Corinthians 2:2 I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

F. Asking Questions; Challenging Presuppositions

G. Relying on the Holy Spirit to Change Hearts

IV. Need for Unity Within the Body of Christ

John 17:20-23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

1 Corinthians 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Philippians 2:2 make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.