

I want to be very honest that is spent the bulk of my life being very confused about what all this is, who Jesus Christ was and is and why that has any real bearing in my life, why Jesus dying on the cross and being resurrected from the grave has any real bearing on my life. Because that's what we're celebrating, right? Now we can play tomorrow, we can dye some stuff, hide some stuff and do all of that tomorrow, but you know that's pretend, right? I know some of you are going, "You're going to ruin this for my kid." All right, I ruined it for your kid, but there's not a magical rabbit who hides eggs. Now I grew up very confused about what this really is, what it has to do with me and how Jesus dying on the cross and being resurrected from the grave should somehow transform the way I live my life. So since I didn't quite understand it, I viewed it perversely.

So let's just get to work. 1 Corinthians 6, starting in verse 9, "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" Now I knew that. You don't have to be around church long, you don't have to be around Christians long to know that they have a list of moral things that, if you fail to achieve perfection, you're out of the kingdom. So knowing this and hearing this, my intellectual awareness of this took place at an early age. I distinctly remember being a very young child outside of San Francisco at camp singing a song about God hating liars. I had the light come on about halfway through the song and I started thinking, "Uh oh! I'm in trouble." And then there's the irony that I'm singing a song about God hating me, judging me and damning me forever. But it had a chipper beat and hand motions, but it didn't make me feel any better about myself. So here's what I began to understand Christianity to be from my earliest memories. Christianity and Christians to me were people who morally lived an upright life. So they didn't have sex before they were married, they don't go to the parties, they don't drink beer, they don't see rated-R movies and they only listen to very lame music. I could go on and on here, but that was my view. Think of Ned Flanders from The Simpsons. Because that's what I thought. I thought this is what Christianity is.

The second thing was this. One of the problems with that view of Christianity is you'll meet Christians. So if your view of Christianity is that Christians are people who live by this strict moral code, then you're going to think all Christians are hypocrites, because you're going to come across them and find out if you get close enough to them that they all fall short of that moral ideal, either blatantly or in secret. So they'll either just overtly fall short and come across as extremely judgmental. Have you ever met that guy? All this demand on your morality but no application to his own self? So you'll come across that guy. And when your view of Christianity is that we're all Ned Flanders and then you meet Homer Simpson pretending to be Ned Flanders, that stirs some animosity in your heart towards Christianity, because you begin to view it as judgmental and harsh. And you'll feel judged, even if you're not being judged. Now for the record, I have no problem believing that some who bear the name of Christ have judged and acted wickedly towards you as nonbelievers or as maybe nominal believers. There is no doubt in my mind that that takes place. But a lot of times, we intrinsically feel the guilt of our actions and we have this posture of trying to discredit Christianity. So we want to discredit it because then we don't have to submit to it. We talked about this several weeks ago in the Habakkuk series. Some people literally Google "Bible inconsistencies." They're looking for a reason to not believe. They want to find people who claim to know Christ who are ridiculous and immature in order to make Christianity invalid. This is a defense mechanism against our own awareness of our shortcomings. So I fall short, so let me discredit this thing by finding somebody who is wicked who claims to know Christ and go, "See, it's not true."

And then if not that, we just pretend. And that's the Bible Belt play. The Bible Belt play is just to come to church and learn Christinese. "So I'll come to church and let me learn how to say what and when to say it. Oh, the ESV is the holy Bible? Okay, let's get the ESV Bible. You use the New King James Version? What don't you love Jesus? Let me get the right kind of journal. What is that, moleskin? Let's get that. When do you raise your hands? Oh, at that part of the song!" And you learn the actions but your heart is far from Him. This is once again a defense mechanism built upon a misunderstanding of who Jesus Christ is and what the gospel is.

So I'll get my cards on the table very early. I don't think a lot of you are saved. I think you have believed a false gospel. I think you have a view of the gospel that is perverse and is not on target. So you're religiously exhausted and gospel ignorant. So I thought I'd just drop that early so we could get past that and dive back into the text.

So my first view was that that's what Christianity was, that we're a bunch of Ned Flanders. And then I would meet people who would say they were Christians but lived just like I lived. They chased girls just like I chased girls, went to the parties just like I went to the parties and tried to get drugs just like I was trying to get drugs. They were doing the same things I was doing, but they just wore a "Lord's Gym" t-shirt. So they were doing the same thing I was but just kind of had that exterior, "I'm a believer." So this caused a lot of frustration in me as I tried to get to the bottom of who Jesus was. Because you cannot hold on to your intellectual integrity if you don't do something with Jesus Christ. You have to do something with this man. He literally invaded planet Earth and changed everything. There are whole systems of government based on His teaching. He is the most polarizing man in the history of the world, and He was a carpenter's Son from Nazareth. How does that happen? There's this tiny little part of the world that really has transformed how a bulk of the world functions. Did you know that the Muslims believe in Jesus? They don't believe the same thing we believe about Jesus, but in the Qur'an, Isa al-Masih is Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Messiah. They do not believe He is God in the flesh, but they believe He was a powerful prophet. Even Islam recognizes there was something profound about this man. They actually believe He'll return one day. When all is said and done, Islam and the Muslims are not our enemies. Are you hearing me? Now there is a spiritual reality and a spiritual war, but in regards to the flesh, we are to love, serve and extend mercy to the Muslim. This is not an "us vs. them." If you think like that, you have bought into propaganda that is unbiblical.

Let's keep going. Look at the next part of the text. "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." The word "reviler" simply means "someone who has contempt for." So you are a reviler if at any point in your life you knew that God said, "Go left," and you went, "Right is the right way to go." So you told God, "I know what You're telling me to do, but I'm smarter than You. So I'm going to do it my way." If you've ever done that you're a reviler. Now if we could get a bit gritty here and be honest, you're on that list. Now here's the game we want to play. The game we play to make us feel better about ourselves is to figure out how many things we are on this list. So we go, "Okay, I've reviled some, I have a little bit of greediness and maybe once or twice I did this. But I'm not these big ones. Do you know who does all these? I'm only three of the nine, but do you know who does nine of the nine? My neighbor Bill. Now Bill is in need of Jesus, and I get Jesus being mad at Bill. In fact, the fact that He has not struck Bill down with lightning blows my mind. But not me, man. I'm three of nine. Three of nine is at least ghetto heaven. It might not be full on heaven, but it's ghetto heaven." So we try to create, "I'm in because I'm not all these things, but I know guys who are all these things. And these are the guys who really need it." You see, this is a problem. Some of you like yourselves way too much. Some of you do not see that your life is an offense to a holy God. Do you know why? Because you're comparing your life to Bill. Compare yourself to the holiness of God and you will fall short. I don't even feel like I need to give an apologetic position for this. You feel it. Some of you hate Christianity because intrinsically you feel your rebellion against God, and so you'll do whatever you can to discredit Christianity so you don't have to submit to the Creator of the universe.

Okay, let's look at what happens next, because this is the first real perversion of Christianity and the gospel, that we are all good, upright and moral people who don't struggle. I call it fine-itis. "How are you doing?" "I'm fine." Look at this next part, because I love verse 11. Verse 11 is going to take us to the second false gospel. "And such were some of you." So here's what happened to me. I'm going, "They're all Ned Flanders." And then I get to know them, and I'm like, "No, they're not." And then I start picking up on the rhetoric on church that you get via testimonies and sermons. I have historically called it moralistic deism. It's this idea that Christians behave in a certain way. So I went, "Okay, they're not all from perfect, spotless backgrounds. They were once shady like I am, and now they're not. So they have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, they have figured how to get it done and they used to drink five bottles of Jack Daniels and now they don't. They used to get high, and now they don't. So the testimony is, 'I used to do these things, and now I don't. Praise Jesus.' So Christians are those who have a shady past but now have, by their will, by their might, by their ability, overcome those addictions, obstacles, pain points and struggles, and now they are living life it should be lived." So here's what I set my heart to do. And I just want to be frank with you. I set my heart to, "Okay, well I want to love Jesus. Heaven sounds good to me opposed to hell. So yes and amen. Let me try to do what's right." And if life was a sprint, I would dominate morality. But it's not. It's a marathon, isn't it? So here's what I learned about myself. I was very, very good at keeping the rules for a couple weeks, sometimes even a couple of months. If the camp high was high enough, maybe half a year. There would be some kind of stirring evening, whether in worship or in something I read or somebody proclaiming the word of God, and I would make an oath. I would straight up go, "I will never do that again. I will never pursue those things again." I had legitimate tears, a legitimate broken heart and would come to the altar and cry with some of my friends. I would go to some of my friends and go, "I need you to hold me accountable for this. I don't want to walk in these ways anymore." They would be emotional and be in it too. They would go, "Yeah, we're never going to do it." And a few weeks later, we would. And then now I've got shame upon shame. And I hold no ill will towards my upbringing. The men and women God placed in my life were providential. I'm standing on this stage as a result of the grace and mercy of God using imperfect vessels to call me unto Himself. I don't believe that what we do here at the Village is perfect, but at the time, my church experience was that everybody was okay. It was like no one struggled with anything in the church where I grew up. Nobody struggled. Everybody's marriage was awesome. Nobody had any secret addictions, nobody struggled with doubt, nobody had a lust issue and nobody had an alcohol issue. All we had were those who had overcome such things. So when you're trying, with your own will, to overcome your sin but are unable to do it and it appears as everyone else is able to, that's shame upon shame that makes you run from God. And again you begin to develop an animosity towards Christians and towards the church because it doesn't work for you. But in reality you never tried it. You tried the same thing you tried before you even considered Jesus. You tried to make your life better by your own means.

Now, the last part of this verse is going to clear it up for us. So look at this with me. "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you." But look at how they got there. So they used to do these things, and they no longer do these things. They did not pull themselves up by their bootstraps. This is not a matter of their sheer will. In fact, look at the text. "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." Okay, we play this game all the time. Are you passive or active in that sentence? Did you wash or were you washed? You were washed. So you're passive, right? So you didn't go, "Oh, look at all this sin on me. Look at all this muck and mire on me. Let me get in the spiritual shower and get this off of me." That's not what happened. The Bible says, "You were washed." You were the passive agent. Something washed you. He also says you were sanctified. In the end, our ability to grow morally is inseparably linked to our understanding of the grace and mercy of Christ and His cross and us being set free to pursue what we already are. So you can't make yourself in God's sight any more holy or blameless than He sees you in Christ. When you get outside of that and you are the author of your own holiness, your own righteousness, if you succeed, you'll simply become self-righteous and

we won't care for you. Who loves the self-righteous guy? The self-righteous guy does. Everyone else has an issue with you if you're self-righteous, even your closest friends. And if I had to bet money, your friends change about every three to four years and you have a whole new group of friends every three or four years. Anytime your name is mentioned, people roll their eyes. "Well not me." No, you. I'm rolling my eyes at your spirit right now. If you succeed, you simply become self-righteous and you relinquish your need for the grace and mercy of Christ, which is what Romans 1 says is the problem with the universe, that you failed to acknowledge your need for a Savior. The whole law is evidence that you need someone to save you. You don't have any righteousness of your own. You can't do it. So you were washed, you were sanctified and you were justified. Who did all of that? Christ did that. So when we come in here, when we sing songs and when I open up this Bible and begin to proclaim from the Bible the gospel of Jesus Christ, we're celebrating that you and I, by our being, by our breathing, are enemies of God who have declared an unwinnable war against an infinitely holy, beautiful, spectacular, all-powerful God. It is an unwinnable war and a war we will lose, because we cannot make right what we have made wrong. Happy Easter.

Now, the big rescue plan all along from day one was that God was going to gift to you righteousness. Where does your perfection come from? Not you. Your perfection doesn't come from you. God's not all geeked up in heaven about you representing Him well down here. He's not going, "You know, I think people would really hate me all over the world if it weren't for that guy. Look at how many ichthuses he has on his car. He has one for him, one for his wife and one for each kid. Anybody who follows that guy, anybody who gets cut off by that guy just knows that I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." So you, in great rebellion against God, no righteousness of your own, are in need of righteousness, washing, sanctification and justification. All of that is wrapped up in Jesus Christ. Jesus, born of a virgin (also something the Muslims believe), lives a spotless, perfect life. If you think of Romans 8, when He says that He condemned the law, He doesn't condemn Jesus, but He condemns the law in Jesus. How? Because Jesus has fulfilled the law. He was perfect, He was spotless, He was blameless and He was what you and I need to be to be reconciled to God. And then what you have happen in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is what theologians would call "double imputation." What that means is simply this. Jesus' righteousness is imputed to you so that when God looks at you, He sees you as perfect, spotless and blameless. And the wrath do for your wickedness, sinfulness and rebellion is absorbed by Jesus Christ on the cross. And the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not that I've picked myself up by my bootstraps, and it's not that I used to do this but now I don't. I am transformed from one degree of glory to the next, but that only occurs correctly, that only grows correctly when I understand that I've been set free to pursue what God already calls me. It's very important that you get that. I am pursuing blamelessness because God already calls me blameless. If I don't get that, then I'm going to constantly run from Him instead of running to Him. Because here I am, close to twenty years into my journey and I'm still falling short. Anyone else? So we're all many years in but still falling short. So for those of you who are young believers who are going, "Man, I'm still struggling." Okay, so are we all. Now we learn to struggle well, but the world is still fallen, still broken and we still walk by the power of the Spirit and we look forward to throwing the sword down and going home in glory or having Christ make all things new so there's no longer a struggle in the new heaven and new earth.

So the resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is what we're celebrating this weekend, is evidence that all of your sin was absorbed in the cross. Now, we play this game often here. How many of your sins were future sins when Jesus died on the cross? So let's talk about this. If all of your sins were future sins when Christ died on the cross and God is outside of time, meaning today is not something He knew about back then but today was a place He was back then, then how confident should we be in the cross' ability to take away our sins? The cross is the objective evidence that He knew and made a way. Oh that your confidence might grow in that. If your confidence grows in that, you'll begin to love the Bible. It won't be a begrudging, "Oh, I've got to study this." It will be, "I get to see more of Jesus more in this. I get to read about God's deep love for Himself and for me made evidenced in Christ." And then we cling to the resurrection that show us that death is dead. It doesn't mean that we're not going to die a physical death, but it does mean that we've got nothing

to fear and there will come a day that, regardless of hardships on earth, there will be a great deal of confidence and beauty in how God has played the most difficult of days out in our lives.

So here's my question. This is how I'll land the plane. I threw my cards down early. I don't think a lot of you get this. I think there is a whole bunch of you who get this intellectually but don't get this in your heart. Just to be fair, do you remember where the Bible says, "Even the demons believe that Jesus is the Christ and they shudder"? But they're not believers, yet they believe. It's not like Christ is going, "Man, why don't you guys go on staff at the Village? Legion, why don't you hop on staff at the Village and help them out?" No, the demons aren't believers, but they believe. So belief is more than intellectual assent. Belief is more than, "Here are the facts." Belief is, "I've been transformed by this reality." So I need you to hear me say this. If you have no transformation, it should bring about you questioning your salvation. I'm not saying you get up at 4:30 in the morning by the waking of the Holy Spirit and read Jonathan Edwards for three hours before you memorize the book of Galatians. That's not what I'm saying. But I'll ask some legitimate questions. Is there a yearning in you to know God, to serve God, to walk with Him, to submit to Him and to make much of Him? Now we stumble about as we do this. But is that yearning there? Is that longing there? Is that desire there? Because I'm just going to lovingly tell you that if it's not there, then something is broken. And maybe that's a hardness of heart that occurred long ago when God said, "Go left," and you went, "You know what? I'm not going left. I'm going right." Maybe you were wounded deeply by someone who bore the name of Christ. Maybe you were part of a church that was unbelievably unhealthy. There are other reasons where that flame of yearning for you could have gone down to just a little spark, but Hebrews clearly says, "Let us worry if we have not entered into His rest." So do you love Him? Do you want to worship Him? Do you want to follow Him? Do you want so serve Him? As strongly as I can put it to you, if you don't, I would question and doubt your salvation for the good of your eternal soul. And I think the reason I feel so provoked on these kind of weekends is because I think some of you are exhausted trying to earn what was freely given to you. And some of you have given up on something you've never tried. You're like my kid with vegetables. "I don't like it." "You've never even tried it." "I still don't like it." You already have it in your mind that it doesn't work. It does work. And do you know what I've got on my side? Thousands of years of history. The question is not, "Does it work?" or "Is it real?" The question is, "Will you submit to the Holy God of the universe and allow Him to be your motivation and allow the Spirit of God to be the fuel that gets the movement of the gospel to work in your heart and life. Now I can only answer that for me, which is why it's always frustrating a bit being a preacher.

Let's pray, "Father, I thank You for these men and women You have drawn to this place. My hope is that You would open up our eyes and hearts to Your goodness and grace. Even those of us who have walked in here tonight in a tough spot, maybe religiously exhausted, maybe having a hard time believing that You could love us, care for us, pursue us, I pray that You would melt all those lies away in the light of Your cross and the light of the fact that You knew every hair on our head before one was there, You knew all the days of our lives before one would be lived out and still Jesus went to the cross. You do not regret the salvation You have extended to us. So I pray that, by the dozens if not by the hundreds in this place, You might draw men and women to Yourself. I pray that there might be a keen understanding of the gospel, maybe for the first time. I pray that we would be able to trust that You love us and that we have free reign to pursue You, not because we're clean or unclean but because You declare us clean in Christ. As we turn our attention to worshipping You in song, may You stir up our affections for You. Help us. It's for Your beautiful name we pray. Amen."