

Series: Future Church

Title: Part 2: A community of orthodoxy in a culture of ideological idolatry.

Text: 2 Corinthians 10v1-5

Time and place: 02/21/2021 at Bridgetown Church

Synopsis: The zeitgeist of our generation is deconstruction. The ideologies of both the Right and the Left are operating as pseudo-religions, and drawing people away from orthodox faith. Each off a political religion “with a twist of Christianity.” How we do stay faithful to Jesus and not let our heart get swept away? Through the practice of reading Scripture we come to let Jesus’ words abide deep in our being, and shape the trajectory of our soul.

Set up:

- Good morning. Please turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10, as we continue our teaching series Future Church.
- We are gearing up to regather as a church in our new building, but as we wait a few more weeks, it’s time to dream about the kind of church we want to be on the other side of COVID-19.
- Up on the docket for today is: a community of orthodoxy in a culture of ideological idolatry.
- Let’s stand for the reading of Scripture...

2 Corinthians 10v1-5

Intro hook:

- Take a look at the following images from the Capital riot on January 6th: **(Pic1)** Notice the man praying at the cross, **(Pic 2)** the man in all black with a Holy Bible, **(Pic 3)** the “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President” flag... just moments before a police officer was beat to death with a flag pole, our former Vice President and others were hunted in the hallways of Capitol Hill, and the peaceful transition of power was upset for the first time in our nation’s 244 year history.
- What are we to make of the use of Christian symbols and language for a violent act that was so blatantly un-Christian?
- Now, I imagine you are feeling a cocktail of emotions right now – anger – at them, *at me*, contempt, grief, even doubt over your Christian identity – if *that’s* what it means to be a Christian, I’m out.
- Those are valid feelings.

- Paul writes about those who “bring the way of truth into disrepute.” (2 Peter 2v2)
- As a group of pastors said in a statement last week on the Capital Riots: “There is a version of American nationalism that is trying to camouflage itself as Christianity – and it is a heretical version of our faith.”
- *But*: the same could
- be said of the Left as well. Portland, as you know, is one the most politically homogenous cities in the world; there is *very little* diversity of thought here, so it’s easy for us to miss how we have been swept up in the culture wars.
- Take a look at a few *more* images. **(Pic4)** Notice the use of the cross and a heart to argue for killing the unborn, the greatest genocide of our time, **(Pic5)** or the Pride Flag flying front of the church steeple, **(Pic6)** or the new trend of the rainbow clerical collar. If you know the history of the clerical collar, it was designed to set the pastor or priest apart from the world; it was white to symbolize holiness, and in the Catholic tradition, to symbolic the priest’s celibacy – the choice to give up sex and marriage to consecrate his entire life to God. What are we to make of that turned into a symbol for something so far from the vision of Jesus?
- What are you feeling *now*? Shocked? *You can’t say that*. Angry at me *for sure*. Confused?
- What if I were to flip the pastors’ statement around and say, “There is a version of American progressivism that is trying to camouflage itself as Christianity – and it is a heretical version of our faith”?

Seam: Now, before you log off or type an angry tirade email; I don’t actually want to talk about politics and sex today; I want to make one simple point: *we live in the age of ideology*. On both the Right and the Left. And I want to talk about what the ideologies of both sides have in *common*.

Movement 1:

Ideology:

- Ideology is marked by two basic features:
- **1. It’s when you take a part of the truth and you make it the whole.** All ideologies start with a truth or good idea, but then they make that one thing the whole thing, and in doing so, distort the vision into a parody of itself.
- An easy example from the last century is the Russian Revolution; what started out as an erudite critique of classism and a vision of a society of equality and justice ended up as the greatest genocide in human history. Utopia became dystopia.

- You see, human are a mixed bag: we're the image of God, and so we're full of goodness and wisdom; but we're also born bent and full of sin; so apart from God, we ruin everything we touch. Second, ideology is...
- **2. When you take a good thing and make it ultimate.**
- Something like equality or justice or freedom or individualism or politics or a nation state – all good things – but when they become the ultimate thing, when they become de facto gods, that people put their faith in, and give allegiance to, the result is disaster. Because God is kicked off his rightful place at the center of our heart.
- The common denominator all ideologies is they put humanity, and its ways, and moral reasoning, and autonomy at the center; not God and his ways, and his judgements, and his loving authority at the center.
- So, they take a part of a truth and make it the whole, and they take a good thing and make it ultimate.
- Interesting, that's also how a lot of Christian theologians define idolatry.
- **Could it be that ideology is the idolatry of our generation?**
- Many cultural analysts over the last year or two have noted the religious nature of ideologies on both sides of the culture wars. **They have a gospel, they a priesthood, they conversion stories, those that do not yet know the truth, they have dogma you have to believe and are not allowed to question or doubt, they have excommunication, they have eschatology – a vision of where human history is going.**
- Ideologies often start out as theories or visions of a better society but then evolve into metaphysical lenses by which people see all of life; in that sense, they attempt to replace religion - they offer an identity and sense of self-worth (even if it's a fragile and performative one), a community of belonging (even if it's a tribal anti-community), they offer meaning and purpose, they offer an ethical vision of good and evil, a line of demarcation between the righteous and the wicked, hope for a better tomorrow – but all without God.
- Decades ago, Leslie Newbigin – the pastor turned cultural analyst – made the prediction that as the West secularized, religion would not go away; rather, it would be transferred to politics. He warned of the rise of what he called “the political religions.”

Seam: But what's confusing is the ideologies of our day, or what Newbigin called the political religions, draw on Christian symbols and language.

With a twist of Christianity:

- In his excellent article *The Sad Irony of Celebrity Pastors*, the journalist Ben Sixsmith writes about the tragic moral fall of a well-known pastor and ties it to a larger pattern that he calls the “with a twist of Christianity trend.”
- He writes:

- “There is mainstream culture, celebrities, fashion, music, modish political activism and a message of self-love, but with a twist of Christianity. Most people stick with mainstream culture because they can have all those things *and* pre-marital sex. We can see the ‘...with a twist of Christianity’ trend elsewhere. [Jerry] Falwell was representative of the right-wing, business-oriented evangelicals who offer capitalist self-enrichment and hubristic jingoism...with a twist of Christianity. Then there are progressive Christians... who promote the usual left-wing causes...with a twist of Christianity. While different in beliefs, such people share patterns of thought: the former believe secular individualists mysteriously share God’s wishes for what should be done with money while the latter think that secular progressives mysteriously share God’s wishes for what should be done with bodies. So, if Christianity is such an inessential add-on, why become a Christian? I am not religious, so it is not my place to dictate to Christians what they should and should not believe. Still, if someone has a faith worth following, I feel that their beliefs should make me feel *uncomfortable* for not doing so. If they share 90 percent of my lifestyle and values, then there is nothing especially inspiring about them. Instead of making me want to become more like them, it looks very much as if they want to become more like *me*.”

Seam: You see, while the ideologies of our day are new, the temptation to mix the way of Jesus and what the NT calls “the way of the world” is ancient.

Age old temptation:

- The age-old temptation of the people of God isn’t to atheism but to idolatry. Not to God *or*, but God *and*.
- This is still going on, thousands of years later; where the name of Jesus is co-opted by ideologies from both sides that, honestly, are rival religions.
- The temptation for most of us is, as it was for Israel, to syncretism, to a kind of DIY faith that’s a mix of Jesus and sabbath and contemplative prayer and progressive sex ethics and western individualism and consumerism.

Movement 2:

Hinge: How are we to live and follow Jesus in an age of ideology?

- 2 Corinthians 10 is a path forward for such a time as this.
- In context, Paul is dealing with a group of false apostles, who claim to be Christian spiritual leaders, but in reality are “...false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself

masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.”

- Look again with me at verse one...

2 Corinthians 10v1-5:

- *By the humility and gentleness of Christ I appeal to you* – note Paul’s tone – he’s wildly at odds with the Corinthians moral vision of reality, but he comes in a spirit of humility and gentleness. The word “appeal” means a polite request. He’s not trying to coerce or control people; calling people to Christ.
- *I, Paul, who am “timid” when face to face with you, but “bold” toward you when away!* – Apparently he wasn’t all that impressive in person, but he was a bold, daring writer.
- *I beg you that when I come I may not have to be as bold as I expect to be toward some people who think that we live by the standards of this world.* – there were some in the church, as there are some in every church, who actually thought we live by the standards of the world.
- The word is a technical term in the NT; it’s used first by Jesus and then picked up by Paul and others...
- The world in the NT is a system of ideas, values, morals, practices, and social norms in a culture corrupted by the twin sins of rebellion against God and the redefinition of good and evil.
- Dallas Willard defined it as: “Our cultural and social practices, that are under the control of Satan and, thus, opposed to God.”
- Dr. Gerry Breshears said it this way: “The world is Satan’s domain, where his authority and values reign—though his deception makes that hard to realize. If you are of the world, then it all seems right.
- Now, there’s a Left version of the world and a Right version... but no matter what side we gravitate toward, we all feel the gravitational pull of the world, and have to resist a kind of orbital decay in our discipleship to Jesus.
- Paul goes on, *For though we live in the world* – we live in Portland.
- *We do not wage war as the world does* – we follow a Rabbi who taught nonviolence and enemy love, who gave his life, rather than take life. So, we don’t ever resort to violence, or even contempt or moral superiority or trolling on social media. We do not wage war as the world does...
- *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power* – meaning, we don’t fight with just intellectualism or moral reasoning – but with the power of God and his gospel.
- *...to demolish strongholds* – (and that word can be translated, “deconstruct, more on that in a minute...) the word here is *ὀχύρωμα*/ochuroma – it’s a military fortification.
- There are strongholds, they are fortified positions of the enemy in the world, and in the church and our individual lives.

- What starts out as a foothold of the enemy – a lie, a habit, a relationship – often grow into a stronghold of evil in your heart that you can't dislodge or drive out.
- Paul goes on to define strongholds as two things:
- *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.*
- 1. "Arguments" – the word in Greek is *logosmai* – it means thoughts or thought patterns or idea matrixes. And...
- 2. "Every pretension" – the word is *hupsōma* and it's hard to translate. It more literally means "exalted thing." It can be translated "every lofty opinion" or Eugene Peterson translates it as "warped philosophies." For our purposes, ideologies.
- So the strongholds are ideas and ideologies that are animated by demonic power, that enslaved us under the enemy.
- As Willard put it, "Ideas, not tyrants, are the primary stronghold of evil in the human soul and society."
- Paul goes on: *we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*
- Note that for Paul the battle for our soul is won or lost on the field of our mind. There is a war raging, not just "out there," but "in here," and it's not between Right and Left, but between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness.
- As followers of Jesus, we wage war in our mind against ideas and ideologies in order to make *all of our life* "obedient to Christ."

Seam: The word used for this for a very long time is **orthodoxy.**

Orthodoxy:

- *Ortho* meaning right in Greek, and *doxa* meaning belief. Right belief.
- You may or may not like that word. But it just means a body of ideas and ethics and practices that have been passed down from the life and teachings of Jesus and the NT writers for two thousand years.
- Yes, followers of Jesus disagree on *all sorts* of secondary issues, and yes the library of Scripture is very clear about some things, and unclear about others.
- But there is a body of truth that you can safely say, *This is what followers of Jesus believe. And, This is how followers of Jesus live.*
- The NT word is just the Way, capital W.
- And orthodoxy – if we call it that, or the Way – is a form of obedience to Christ, a form of allegiance to Jesus as Lord.
- Or put another way, it's a form of trusting surrender to love.
- And we are an orthodox church; *there is no hiding that.* I know many of you are new to Jesus, and many more are trying to figure out what you believe – and we work very hard to teach with nuance and thoughtfulness and humility to the best of our ability.

- But our leaders have come to realize that we need to stop beating around the bush. We are not a progressive church, nor are we a conservative church. We do not align with the Left or the Right; we are a Jesus church.
- We love Jesus. We trust his wisdom and intelligence and goodness. We find his life and teachings to be the most compelling and true vision of life on offer. We love prayer, we love to experience Jesus' presence and peace by the Spirit. We love Scripture, we ache not just to read and understand it, but to live it out. And while we are quick to apologize for all the ways that we do not measure up to Jesus' example, we do not apologize for our love of Jesus and our allegiance to him as not just a smart rabbi or social activist – but as the Lord of all creation. The Christ/King whom God raised from the dead and set at his right hand to rule over the universe. Who one day will return to put the world to rights, to judge the righteous and the wicked, and to reign forever.
- That's who we *are*.

Seam: I know this is hard for a lot of you to swallow...

Deconstruction:

- We are living in a generation wide crisis of deconstruction. All around us people – in our own church – are being swept away by the ideas and ideologies of our time.
- Next week, on March 3rd, we're hosting a livestream lecture with Dr. AJ Swoboda on his new book *After Doubt: How to Question Your Faith Without Loosing It*, which is all about deconstruction.
- But let me speak to it for just a few moments...
- The first thing that must be said about deconstruction is there's a *good* type of deconstruction that we see in Jesus and the Hebrew prophets and the Reformers, where they use Scripture to critique world's influence corruption of the church.
- But then there's another type of deconstruction, that of Western millennials who use *the world* to critique *Scripture's* authority over the church.
- The former is the way of Jesus; for example, it's what's caused us to rethink a lot of issues, from just war theory to the role of women in the church. The latter is not.
- The second thing that must be said is that deconstruction is the middle of a process of maturation, *not* the end goal. **Developmental psychologists talk about a three-stage process:**
 - o **Construction – in your childhood and family of origin you are handed the building blocks for a worldview, along with a template, and you construct one. This is good and healthy, but it tends to be black and white. Very little room for mystery. We are very self-righteous and rigid in stage one.**

- Then deconstruction – as you become an adult, you realize all the problems and issues with your worldview, all the ways the template you were handed was skewed. We start to question, doubt, search out truth.
- Then comes *reconstruction* – as you rebuild a worldview based on the best wisdom of previous generations, but one that you now own with humility, wisdom, and conviction. Stage three is what the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur called “a second naivete.”
- We live in a stage one and two culture.
- There’s a conservative version of stage one, that I grew up. “The Bible says, I believe it, that settles it.” It doesn’t allow space for doubt or questions; it confuses one’s interpretation of the Bible with the Bible itself, and therefore is corrupted by human fallenness.
- And there’s a progressive version of stage one – where people parrot the fad lingo of various ideologies, people unthinkingly accept ideas that are full of contradiction and bias, and, just like conservatives, do not allow space for doubt or questions; you’re labeled a heretic and shamed if you even question the dogma.
- But overall, we’re in a stage two culture. Where people get stuck in a kind of limbo, more against evil than for good, more skepticism than faith.
- Very few people are stage three – where they have deep convictions about God and Scripture and reality, but they also have a high capacity for mystery and ambiguity and the paradox of the human condition and even the Bible; who live in humility, compassion, but also conviction. They exist, but in small number.
- All that to say, deconstruction is not the end goal! It’s the middle of a process.
- If you’re *in* that process, please, let our pastoral team come along side you, love you, serve you on your spiritual journey. Don’t deconstruct alone, with the voice of a cynical podcast in your ear; but in community, under the Spirit’s leading; you will come out the other side *more* in love with Jesus.
- The last thing that must be said about deconstruction is that it’s much more complex than a simple – you’re orthodox or a heretic – binary.
- There’s no one-size-fits-all paradigm, but as I see it – and this is just my pastoral perspective – deconstruction is the axis point between three external factors, and three internal. At the external: **(Diagram 1)**
 - 1. A “cheap grace” as Bonhoeffer called it and low discipleship culture that is more interested in making converts than making apprentices to Jesus. *The Western church – for a very long time – has created a milieu in which it is possible to be a “Christian” but not a disciple of Jesus. To have Christ without a cross.*
 - 2. Then you have ascendent secular ideologies – again, on both sides – that are coming to replace Christianity in the Western world; quasi-religions that are not just held by elites, but spread by the digital IV into our mindstream, and educated into us by the school system, pop culture, and capitalist marketing departments.

- 3. Then you have the tragic break down in trust of spiritual leaders.
 - Just this week another story broke of Ravi Zacharias, who we thought was one of the good ones! But gross sexual misconduct. How many stories can a generation take before all trust in spiritual leaders is burned up?
- So, at the external, you have a low discipleship culture, aggressive secular ideologies, and a lot of distrust. Then at an internal level... **(Diagram 2)**
 - 1. You have a lack of the fear of God. And with it, a lack of surrender to God's fierce love. A Christianity without a cross. The result is an undisciplined flesh, or an un-disciplined flesh, that is coddled and given free reign rather than conquered by the Spirit's power.
 - 2. Then you have a mind that is full of digital input, rather than saturated in Scripture and prayer.
 - The Barna group report that the average millennial consumes over three thousand hours of digital content a year, only 150 of which is Christian. That's a 20:1 ratio.
 - This is key to realize because, as Hwee Hwee Tan put it, "You become what you contemplate." You become what you give your attention to.
 - If your ratio of secular ideas to Jesus' truth is 20:1, that's going to have a corrosive effect on your faith.
 - 3. Then finally, you have a wounded heart. I know almost no people who have deconstructed their faith who were not first wounded – by a spiritual leader or church, or by their family or origin – or it could be a wound from singleness and loneliness – a lot of people deconstruct out of the pain of not being able to find a Christian spouse. The wound could be from anything, but you likely carry a wound.
 - *And emotional wounds are often portals for the demonic into our heart. Then you have a kind of double-trauma. The original trauma of an emotional hurt, followed by the even worse trauma of demonic lies, such as when people who suffer abuse, then come under assault from a lie that says they are unloved.*
 - *It's a great tragedy, and if that's you, we are so very sorry.*
 - But together, the lack of a fear of God, a mind that is caught up in the noise of the world, and a wounded heart, become easy prey for the enemy.
- Now, for those of you who are in deconstruction as we speak, this is *not* an attempt to label you; this has been a testing year on our faith; this is my loving attempt to plead with you to return to the love of God. And to rest of us, it's my *appeal* to "guard your heart, for from it flow the issues of life." Don't let a stronghold of ideology take root in your inner life.

This is the call of Paul in the text...

- Paul calls on us as followers of Jesus to aim the deconstructionist impulse not at the orthodoxy of the way of Jesus but at the ideologies of the world.

Movement 3:

Seam: Now, as we wind down... Is there a practice from the way of Jesus to index our hearts away from captivity to ideology and toward the freedom of the Way. To demolish the strongholds of the enemy in our heart? Yes, there are many, but at the top of the list is Scripture.

Scripture:

- Scripture is a library of writings that are both human and divine that together tell a unified story that leads us to Jesus.
- Jesus was a rabbi, or a Bible teacher. His mind was saturated in Scripture. He would teach it, quote it, pray it, live it. He was obedient to scripture as a form of surrender to the Father. For him, it was more than good literature; it was God-breathed truth. In reading Moses or David or Isaiah, he was reading God's word over his life. And then God raised Jesus from the dead to validate Jesus' view of reality.
- To clarify, we don't trust in Jesus because of the Bible; we trust in the Bible because of Jesus.
- For us as followers of Jesus, our aim isn't just to read Scripture, or even to understand it, but to obey it, as an act of faith in Jesus.
- But more than that, it's a vehicle for abiding in Jesus. Jesus said, "If you abide in me *and my words abide in you*, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."
- All of us have words – or ideas – that flow through our mind all day long. To let Jesus' words remain in us, is to let his ideas – this truth – flow through our mindstream and give shape to the inner architecture of our heart.
- Our apprenticeship to Jesus, therefore, must curate our mindstream. It must guard our mind against the ideas and ideologies that are set against the knowledge of God, which for us means strict discipline around our phones and internet and TV, in quality, frequency, and moral tenor. But we must also guide our mind *into* truth, by living in Scripture.
- There's no right way to read Scripture. You can read a small section slowly and prayerfully, what some call *Lectio Divina*; you can also read – or listen – to large swaths of scripture at once, which is how much of Scripture was designed to be experienced – a community sitting through an entire literary work in one sitting; you can study it one word at a time, listen to teachings on it, memorize it, pray it, etc.

- But we have a practice up for you to work through with your Bridgetown Community at [Bridgetown.Church/future](https://www.bridgetownchurch.org/), as we continue to develop our rule of life.
- We have three levels of engagement for your consideration.
 - o Entry level – this coming week, set aside a little to read Scripture. Start with a Psalm or the NT.
 - o Baseline, meaning, what we invite all of you to work toward – commit to the daily reading of Scripture and to self-imposed limits on screen time and intake of entertainment in quantity, frequency, and moral nature.
 - o The we have some reach practices – such as start a Bible reading plan, or listen to the Bible Project podcast, or do an online Bible study.

Ending:

- To end, contrary to popular opinion: Faith is not a religious thing. *We all live by faith.*
- We're all trying to get somewhere we've never been – call it the good life, or the kingdom of God. But we need to rely on the mental maps of someone else who is ahead of us, who we judge to be trustworthy and true. That's an act of faith.
- The question isn't, Do you live by faith? But *who* or *what* do you put your faith *in*?
- The culture tells us to put our faith in our self, in our own inner barometer of good and evil, our inner intuitions, feelings, and desires. To follow your heart, we are told, is the path to human flourishing. Of course, politicians and marketing departments the world over have a vested interest in us believing this, because it keeps us blind to just how much of our inner barometer has actually been shaped by *their desires*, not the deepest desires of our own heart. It's behavioral economics masquerading as “be true to yourself” individualism. And the signs are *all around us* that our culture's mental maps are off kilter.
- But what is it that we all want? No two people are the same, but we all want to be happy, to be loved, to live with meaning and purpose, to suffer and die, but to do so with hope.
- Ignatius of Loyola defined sin as “unwillingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness.” To turn that around, *obedience to Jesus and his Way is willingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness.*
- We are a community of orthodoxy in an age of ideological idolatry. **This doesn't mean we don't ask questions, or have doubts; it just means we're** people who live by faith in Jesus' mental maps of reality, who trust him to lead and guide us into the life we all desire, who are human and finite and hurt and get things wrong *all the time*, but who love and follow Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.