

Counter-Cultural Christians

By Sinclair B. Ferguson

Preached on April 25, 2010

Text: Romans 12:9-21

Link: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3912854592>

OPENING PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, we thank you again for the joys of the Lord's day. For the privilege of worship and fellowship. For the access we have in singing, and in the reading of your word -- the freedoms that we enjoy to praise you together. For the encouragement that you give to us. And yet, as we come to you, tonight, we come with fresh needs for a new week. We come with an uncertainty as to what will unfold in these coming days. And we look to you to be the supplier and provider of everything that we need. That there may be food for our souls in your word. That there may be truth for our minds in its gracious teaching. That there may be correction of our lives and even rebuke of our sins. And as we thank you that you are a God who sends His Spirit to move among us quietly, privately, we pray that you would take your own word as it is expounded to us tonight, and apply it individually as well as corporately, that we may sense that there is a word from the Lord for us in this place, and at this time, and for our lives. So come to us we pray and help us as we study the Scriptures. In Jesus our Savior's name, Amen.

Please be seated.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

I want to mention before we turn to the Scriptures this evening, again, the CD that our choirs have recorded Psalms, hymns and anthems and totaled His mercy last forever. And you will find this in the book room. The price is \$12. And to encourage you to get several copies, all of those \$12 from every one of these CDs, will pass directly through the church books, and go to the support of Westminster Theological Seminary in Uganda. A ministry in which we have been closely involved over the last couple of years. So this is an opportunity to listen to good music, well sung, and also to contribute largely to the spread of the gospel. Not only in Uganda, but students come from many different African countries to the seminary there. And it has become a ministry that we corporately love, and that we want to support. I can't resist the temptation to wonder if I'm of an age to go to the senior adult retreat. And if I do, and you are there, you will probably find me sitting in the seminar for the sons and daughters of the revolution. Just to see what it looks like from the other side. I say that -- all of our own members know that -- Craig Wilks, who probably has had a hand in all of these things, his son is named George. So there is -- we seek to live the balanced International Christian life here at First Presbyterian Church.

SCRIPTURE READING:

Well, let's turn in our Bibles as we continue our studies in Romans to Romans chapter 12. And this evening, we're going to read there from verse nine through verse 21. Our section last week in which we were led by Duff James took us from verse nine through verse 13. And this evening, we are going to focus our attention on verses 14 through 21. But let's read the whole section.

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil, with good.

SERMON:

If today, as well as being in the six o'clock service, just now, you were also in the 8:30 service this morning, you might think that today I feel like a very wounded preacher. I began the 8:30 message by speaking about uh -- painful, but illuminating experience I had when I was very young preacher. And I think I may have told some of you at least another rather painful story from perhaps 20, 25 years ago, when speaking at a multi-state student conference on the subject given to me, "To know him" (that is to know Christ). After the second address, I was taken into a dimly lit room by the leaders of the student organization. And given what I would colloquially call a "doing over" by these leaders. Who were extremely critical of my first two addresses for this reason. "We have now" they said, "listened to you for two solid hours, and you are yet to tell us anything that we are to do." Once I had bitten my tongue, and sought to turn the other cheek, I mildly said to them, "If you listen to the next two addresses, you may hear more you have to do than you ever bargained for." But what I was secretly thinking was, isn't it striking that these people regard themselves as Christian leaders -- are in the process of giving me a theological doing over -- and they don't seem to understand the grammar of the gospel. I actually wondered if they'd ever read through Paul's letter to the Romans. And if perhaps the Apostle Paul had been the speaker at the conference, if he also would have been brought into a darkened room, having expounded his way through Romans one through 11 and told -- you have expounded 11 chapters of solid Christian doctrine and you've only given us a couple of things that we are supposed to do. I think the Apostle Paul would have been inclined to say with his Jewish humor, my friend, just wait for Romans chapter 12. Because if you take the time to read through Romans chapter 12, in one sitting, you will discover -- although they come in several different forms -- that there are about 40 imperatives in Romans chapter 12.

And Paul, as it were, as we have anticipated in our exposition, opens the sluice gates of the exhortations he wants to give God's people in order that they may live lives that are consistent with the gospel. But if that is not grounded in his exposition of God's saving mercy to us, one of two things will be the result. Either we will be crushed to death, or we will become little legalists.

And the reason Paul has sought to ground us in Romans in all the indicative truths of what Jesus Christ has done for us, and all that Jesus Christ shows us of God, and all that the gospel implies in the transformation of our very and fundamental existence -- All of this has really been to help us to understand that since we are by God's grace new men and women in Jesus Christ, given the gracious gift of the Spirit of sonship, by a loving Heavenly Father shielded by all that Jesus Christ has done for us, you understand that so only when all of this is in the foundation of our lives that we can cope with this machine gunfire of exhortation that now rushes from the lips of the apostle Paul. We can never, my dear friends, we can never have too much understanding of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Because all the commands of the gospel, require all the grace of God in Jesus Christ, if we are to live in those commands, with the joy and freedom and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, we find ourselves as we so often tend to do, burdened down by the commandments of Scripture. Feeling we are incapable of responding to them. Feeling perhaps that they go into too much detail in our lives. But when we are captured and captivated by the grace of God in Christ and empowered by His indwelling Spirit, these commandments become our delight. The detail of them becomes our joy. And so now that he has reached this stage in his exposition, the apostle Paul has no fears about exhortation, after exhortation, after exhortation about how to live a life that is glorifying to God.

And He had spoken largely in verses nine through 13, about how this works out in the context of our mutual fellowship with one another. Genuine love. Brotherly affection. Outdoing one another in showing honor. Not slothful in zeal. Fervent in spirit. Rejoicing in hope. Patient in tribulation. Constant in prayer. Contributing the needs of the saints. Seeking to show hospitality. It is actually a most beautiful picture of what the church is called to be. It underlines for us that the gospel not only transforms us as individuals, but it transforms us as individuals to build us into a gloriously transformed community. A community in which people give place to one another. Actually outdo one another in showing honor to one another. So when we see something of this order in the life of the church, we understand what the Apostle meant earlier on in verses one and two about lives being transformed by the renewal of the mind.

But you'll notice when he moves on in the section to verses 14 through 21, the opening words rather indicate to us that he is now moving from within the fellowship of God's people, to outside the fellowship of God's people. Not simply the reaction of God's people to one another, but the action and reaction of God's people to a world that may well be hostile to the Gospel. And so he uses such language as "persecution". As "experiencing evil". As for example, verse 12, "having enemies." Verse 21, "being in danger of being overcome by evil." So all of this theology that he's been expounding to us, it's not so that we live in some sheltered environment where we love to talk theology. It is intended to give us such a vision of the glory of Jesus Christ, the privileges of the Christian faith and the power of the Holy Spirit that will enable us to live transformed lives in a hostile world. Christian lives in a secular environment -- counter cultural lives. Lives that belong to the culture of Heaven and yet are lived out in the culture of the earth. So that as these Christians were simultaneously in Christ and at Rome, we who are here may in a similar way be in Christ, and yet at Columbia. And live in every conceivable circumstance, in every place in every occupation in Colombia, as those who marched to the beat of a different drummer

whose citizenship is in heaven. And who live as those who are energized and transformed by our living relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And in these many more exhortation he now gifts to us, I think it's helpful for us to see that there are basically three things that he's focusing our attention on. What marks the Christian, by and large, in the world in which we live? Number one, the Christian brings blessing. Number two, the Christian seeks harmony. And number three, the Christian overcomes evil. Brings blessing. Seeks harmony. Overcomes evil.

Now, the first of these is obviously in verses 14 and 15. "Bless those who persecute you. Bless, and do not curse them." And then perhaps an illustration of that principle. "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." It's actually a very simple but profound thought, isn't it? What drives me as a Christian, is to bring blessing wherever I am and wherever I go. In whatever circumstances I find myself. Even in the midst of the kind of opposition that the apostle Paul seems to have in view here, my driving consideration is this, how can I bring blessing into this situation -- blessing to this person's life rather than judgment and cursing.

And you'll notice that characteristic of the apostle Paul, he rather underlines for us that this isn't something men and women do naturally. Now some of us have been blessed with a generous disposition. But we are all sinners still as Christians. And so Paul is saying, there needs to be in the Christian life as we advance here that same old pattern I've pointed out to you so often, as it were, he says. That there needs to be the "no" to that which is unworthy of the Christian: "do not curse". And there needs to be a glorious "yes" to that which is characteristic of the Christian. The Christian is somebody who first and foremost seeks the blessing of others.

And of course, as we know the scriptures, many of us know the scriptures quite well, don't we? We realize that this language of blessing and cursing is essentially salvation language. It's the language that's associated in the Bible with God saving covenant. That when God saving covenant is received and trusted, then blessings are experienced. And when God's saving covenant promises are resisted, then cursing and judgment is experienced. And he seems to be suggesting that what drives the Christian is his or her passionate concern, that saving blessings should fall upon the heads of those, each one of us knows.

And so the question is, how does that work out in practice? How do we bless others? And what drives us to bless others? Actually, the second part of that question is a little more straightforward to answer. What drives us to bless others is that God has blessed us. It is our understanding of the gospel, that what we deserve from God is God's curse and God's judgment, because we have been his enemies. And yet Paul has already taught us, remember in chapter five, the wonder of the Gospel is that when we were his enemies, Christ blessed us by dying for us. And so you see, one of the things that we need to keep fresh in our Christian lives is, is the very essence, the simplicity of the gospel itself. We can never afford to move on from this. We may grow up in this, but we can never afford to move on from this, that what makes us Christians is that we've come to understand that He loved us when we hated him. He died for us when we were his enemies. And because He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, in this way, we are, as it were energized as we look at others, even those who may be our enemies, as he mentioned in verse 20, or those who persecute us, as he mentioned, in verse 14. We are driven on to think, "I persecuted him, I was his enemy, and he blessed me in Jesus Christ.

What else can I do? To say to myself in every situation, and circumstance, how can I bring the blessings of grace into this person's life? What can I say? What can I do?"

And so he gives us this little illustration. He says, You rejoice with those who rejoice, and you weep with those who weep. Now, it's often been remarked in the history of reading and expounding Romans, since very early on, in the Christian church, Christians have understood, it's actually a lot easier to weep with those who weep, then it is to rejoice with those who rejoice. Isn't it? Of course, it is. We weep with those who weep, because they have lost what we fear losing. But sometimes much more of a challenge to rejoice with those who rejoice, because they have attained and received what we may NOT have attained and received. But you see, this is how the gospel works. This is how it transforms our natural disposition. Really, to rejoice!

I think there's a very simple illustration of this. I sometimes ask my friends who are ministers, "Tell me, I'll never tell anybody how you answered this question." So I'll not mention any names? Do you prefer conducting funerals or weddings? Do you know the majority of my friends, which may tell you something about the kinds of people who are attracted to friendship with me, say, "Oh, easily funerals." Why? Because there is a greater inclination for people to be in sympathy with the sorrow. But actually, to rejoice in the joy of a bride and a bride groom... And you just need to conduct a wedding to see that perhaps the family is happy -- perhaps the family is not happy. But as you move backwards in the church, as a matter of relative indifference, who cares? Let's get on with the business. Let's get out of here. Let's get to the reception. Let's get home. What am I doing here? I never wanted to be in church. And so at the most obvious level, in these moments, which should fill us with joy, the matter of relative indifference to us, because we are not really by nature driven to find blessing for others. But the Christian is. And you know, wherever you work, wherever your neighborhood is, these two things, weeping with those who weep in a way that really empathizes with them, because you realize from your study of Scripture, how enormous is the loss of a loved one. Even, even if you haven't experienced a great deal of it yourself? You understand it from the scriptures? And your heart goes out. And when somebody is rejoicing, your heart similarly goes out to them in joy that there is blessing in their lives and you pray and speak, to seek to encourage them to see that the Heavenly Father is the author of every good and perfect gift that comes down from above. Because you long to see those who are indifferent to Jesus Christ, being blessed by Jesus Christ, just as you have been blessed by Jesus Christ.

And so in every situation, this is the hallmark of the Christian believer: focus my gaze upon the answer to this question. How can I bring blessing in this situation? Now, of course, you need to learn to do that. Don't you? We're not very good at it. We need to work at it. We need to pray that the Lord will enable us to do this. But it's -- It's the great secret.

I remember years ago, one of our sons who was a surgeon, when he was doing his training coming back from a trauma conference. I think the conference had been a trauma, but it was actually on trauma. And finding yourself in situations where you're called out of the hospital to some vast emergency and there's blood all over the place. People are crying. People are panicking, and arms seemed to be broken; and, legs seem to be broken. And when he came home, I said to him, "Well, did you enjoy the conference?" "Dad", he said, "it was great." Well, you know what surgeons are like? I said, "Well, what was so great about it." He said, "the thing that was so great about it was this, that it taught me to focus on the really important things in situations like that." The really important things!

That were not necessarily the kind of things that you and I would think were the important things. We'd be in a state of panic saying somebody stopped this blood.

Now, no matter what kind of situation you're in, you're in a situation where people are panicking. You're in a situation where there is great loss -- where there is sadness. Or you know, a situation, where there is great joy. And actually great joy, interestingly, can sometimes bring out the worst in people. So what am I to focus on? Well, it's simply this, He has blessed me. I bless him. Bless the Lord oh my soul. Forget not all His benefits. Forgives your sins. Transforms your life. Fills your heart with joy. How can I bring that blessing into the situation? Now, my dear ones, especially if you are of a negative personality, you need to learn this. And some of us are. Some of us have that little quirk in our personalities, that we dive for the things that are wrong and bad. And we dive straight in and we make them worse. And that's an area of your life and my life where the gospel needs to be at work to turn us round to say, "Now, Lord, how am I to bring blessing in the situation? Give me wisdom and insight. Make me the kind of person by whose very presence there will be blessing in this situation." Because that's the difference the gospel makes to the Christian. The Christian brings blessing even to those who persecute him.

Now you need to just survey the evangelical landscape to see that that isn't the characteristic response that we have. Is it? Our characteristic response -- I didn't ask permission, is this. Let's get them back! And Paul is saying, No. Let's ask the question, how do we bring gospel mercy and gospel blessing into the situation?

So Paul is teaching us that as those who no longer belong to this world who are being transformed by the renewal of our minds Christians are those who seek to bring blessing. Second, Christians are those who seek to bring harmony. And it looks to me as though Paul is, is -- he puts this in a really helpful way, I think in verses 17 and 18. He says, now look, "live in harmony with one another". Verse 16, "Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited, repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all and if possible, so far as it depends on you live in harmony -- live peaceably with all."

And you see, although this section is largely focused on the Christians response to the non Christian world, it looks as though he gets back into the life of the Christian fellowship here, doesn't it? Live in harmony with one another? Now, what's he saying? He's saying this. He's saying this is the place if you're going to practice being a Christian, this is the place to practice being a Christian. By living in harmony with one another in the life of the church. This is the practice area for living in the world. You're never going to be able to be a peacemaker, a bringer of harmony in the world if you're a bringer of discord in the church. The person who brings discord in the family is not the person who brings concord outside of the family. And he saying now this is a, this is a great environment in which to practice living in harmony. That should be one of the beauties of our fellowship, dear friends, shouldn't it? The church should be the one safe place in our lives. But it isn't always, because this disposition, that curses rather than blesses can eat its way into the life of the church. And we lose sight of creating harmony in the life of the church. And Paul is very helpful to us here. I think it's not so obvious in our English translations. But in verse 16, he uses some form of the verb "to think" three times. And that's very significant. Because, of course, back to verses one and two, how is my life to be transformed in this way? By the renewing of my mind. So the gospel changes, not first of all, the way I feel about things, actually, Paul scarcely mentions feelings at all here. What the gospel transforms is the way I think about situations. The way I think about him the way I think about myself in relationship to him.

And the way I think about others. So he says, with respect to others, he says, literally, "Think the same things. Live in harmony with respect to either lowly service or lowly people." He says, Don't think it or them beneath you.

That's a great grace, isn't it? How many people are beneath you? You know situations -- she's beneath me. You see? She's a pain in the neck in the church. He's a troublemaker in the church. It's beneath me. You know, sometimes we resort to that as though we're a virtue. It's beneath me to do that kind of thing. And Paul is saying the problem there is your thinking is not transformed by the gospel. Why? Because if the Son of God had looked upon you and said he or she is beneath me, you would be lost for all eternity. And if he has not counted it beneath himself -- beneath his dignity, if he has had that disposition, to say, I will guard my privileges at the right hand of my father, because he is beneath me expanding these privileges anywhere, then we would all be ushered into a lost eternity. And so the least the gospel does to us is it teaches us to think there is no one in the fellowship, there is nothing in the fellowship, beneath me to do. To love. To speak to. You see, that's the attitude of the world isn't it? Attitude of the world is, I measure other people by the things I have, I have accomplished, I possess, I can do, which they can't. And that only creates division. But the thing about the fellowship -- this is the thing I sometimes think to myself, I wish I could kind of kidnap. I mean, legally kidnap unbelievers without them knowing it. And then kind of stick them down on a Sunday night at the end of the evening service, to watch who is speaking to whom. And have signs above their head. This is a very important man, this actually isn't a very important man. Do you see the way they're talking to one another?

I've never forgotten I may have told you this before. Being back for a funeral service of a dearly loved elder whose father had counseled me the night I became a Christian. And, and as we sat at the back of the church as the funeral service began, a woman of very ordinary background probably had left school when she was 15, came down the aisle, and there was only one seat. And the seat was beside the only man in the congregation who had been knighted for services to the nation by the Queen. And she sat down right beside them. And then she put her arms around 'em. I never asked my knighted friend's wife, what she thought of this, and she planted a great big Scottish kiss on his cheek. And I thought that would have given my friend whose funeral service, this was, the thrill of his life as it was giving me. I thought to myself, that's why I love the church. Because that kind of thing happens. And it doesn't happen anywhere else.

So it's a matter of transformed thinking, because you no longer think anyone is beneath you. Do you? If Jesus Christ has come from heaven, to sinners, like ourselves and died for us, taking our place on the cross, not thinking that we were beneath him -- When the gospel really impacts my mind, it transforms my whole disposition to others. Which is why Jesus says, in as much as you have done it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you have done it to me. Because that's what I'm like. So with respect to myself, he says, with respect to others, "Don't be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be considered. Never think of yourself more highly than you ought to think."

And you see, when that kind of transformation takes place in the life of the church, it carries out of the church -- it bursts out of the church door, and it's carried into the world. So that the Christian never allows the evil that is done to him or to his brothers and sisters, to set the agenda for his own response to that evil. And so he says, repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. Not only a question of how can I bring blessing but how can I do and fulfill that which is good and true and beautiful? So that I may live in harmony with others, "if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." The Christian is a peacemaker, not a troublemaker. The

Christian is somebody whose sheer spiritual vitality should enable even those who aren't Christians to find some level of working harmony in the office or in the school or wherever, just because you're present.

I have a friend who went on one of these great polar expeditions when he was a young man with one of the most famous explorers of the time. And it was sad of my friend -- he's older than I was, but he was a young man then. It was said of him by the leader of the expedition, "He kept the party clean." But he was the youngest person there. But there was just something of this heavenly touch about him that transformed the situation. Ahh, you say, but if the if you do that kind of thing, people, people just people have no time for you. So what's new?

I so happened to be reading Tertullian this week. Tertullian lived from about 150 A.D. to 220 -- some people think about 240. And here he is writing about what it's like to be a Christian in the second century. He says, "What are we to think of it that most people so blindly knock their heads against the hatred of the Christian name? That when they bear favorable testimony to anyone, they mingle it with abuse of the name he bears? "A good man", says one, "is Gaius Sias, only he's a Christian." You know, that's like saying it's a nice man, but he's a Democrat, isn't it? That's what happens. But then he goes on to say, "Nobody thinks you even need to ask the question whether Gaius is good, because by definition he's going to be good if he's a Christian. " Not the reputation of Christians in 21st century United States, is it? That would be fine. Let them say what they want to say do what they want to do, as long as they cannot deny that Christians are good men and good women. And that's what Paul is saying here. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. So that people will be driven whether they like it or not to respect the goodness of your life. By God's grace, maybe sufficiently troubled and question why it is that your life is so different from theirs. That you are all their conscience tells them they should be but aren't.

So the Christian seeks to bring blessing. The Christian seeks to encourage harmony. And thirdly, the Christian overcomes evil. And Paul summarizes this, doesn't he, in verse 21. "Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Now how are we overcome by evil? We are overcome by evil when we allow evil to set the agenda of our lives, and when we respond to evil in the same spirit with which evil responds to us. Now, that's one of the reasons why some of the scenes I see on television, of the behavior of Christians, perhaps doing things that are noble -- falls foul of this principle. Because it's responding to ungodliness in exactly the same spirit with which ungodliness responds to Christian faith. And the thing about the gospel is not only that it presents you with new, gracious, divine truth, but it creates in you a new, gracious and divine spirit in the way in which you handle that truth and react and respond to enemies. So, says Paul, "don't be overcome by evil" -- don't let evil set the agenda. "But rather overcome evil with good." You see it's -- he's saying it's, it's goodness. It's not force or violence, but it's the good things of the gospel that dissolve evil. Ahhh but ummm -- You can easily be in a panic when evil is so evil, can't you? Ah now says Paul, just, just hold on a minute, wait a minute, he says, "Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the Lord." Give place to the wrath of God. Say to yourself, that's the business of the wrath of God. That's not the business of my wrath. Give room for the wrath of God for it's written, isn't this in Deuteronomy 32, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay says the Lord. So if your enemy is hungry, feed him if he's thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." God will see to your situation.

Remember how the psalmist Asaph wrestled with this, Psalm 73? He saw the ungodly prosper and standing on the faces of believing people. And then he says you remember in Psalm 73, "Then I went

into the house of the Lord, and I saw their end. " And that dissolved any spirit of vengeance that was in him. And he left them to God. And he kept on living a stable life of grace, and faith.

So if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. Why? Because by doing so, says Paul, "you will heap burning coals on his head." Now those words reflect the teaching of the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs chapter 25. And I don't think anyone is absolutely certain precisely what this idea of heaping burning coals on someone's head might be. But almost certainly mean something like this. That you will overcome evil by God's grace. Not by vengeance, but by blessing. Not by vitriol, but by goodness. Some think that because, certainly there's a deep connection between the collection of Proverbs in the book of Proverbs and the wisdom of the ancient near east that the reference here may well be to a ritual that was in Egypt that when a man was truly penitent he would carry burning coals in a little brazier on his head as a sign that he was truly repentant. Or whether Paul means that what will happen when we live for Jesus Christ in an ungodly world is that men and women's consciences will be touched and melted by the fires of grace. Or, hardened by the fires of grace -- so that they can never be melted. But in either case, the Christian doesn't live as though this world were his home, or his citizenship, or ultimately here. He lives in Christ who came from Heaven's glory for hopeless and helpless and condemned enemies and died in our place. And that's why we bless those who persecute us.

It's almost bound to happen to some of us this week. May not be life threatening. May just be a swear word. May just be a disposition. Focus, focus, focus, blessing, blessing, blessing! And then wait and see how God works? Because this is his way. Now, is that enough imperative for you? For one Sunday night?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Heavenly Father we worship you for the riches of your grace. For the gospel of Christ, that not only thrills us by the sheer mystery of your love for us in him but energizes us and makes us long to be more and more like Jesus. But there may be something of the fruit of your grace in our lives, as we live in a world that is estranged from you, and among those who are your enemies and at times, even our enemies. Oh give us the grace and the strength and the mutual encouragement that we need, Heavenly Father, to live this counter cultural life in every situation in which you place us. And this we pray for Jesus, our great Savior's sake. Amen.