

Authentic Christianity

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I) Acts 5:1-11; Amos 7:4-8

II) Introduction

A) *Impostors*

- 1) Jesus called them hypocrites. The people who listened to Jesus preach and teach knew what he meant. Hypocrites are actors. impostors who pretended to be someone that they were not.
- 2) If you look hard you can find lots of examples of hypocrites in nature. Bugs that pretend to be sticks, lizards that change the color of their skin in order to blend in with their surrounding. Birds who have the ability to mimic the call of other birds. How about a little fish that puffs itself into a big thorny ball to make predators think that it is a big scary threat even though it is nothing but a blown up balloon. The question we may ask is why.
- 3) Why would an animal become a hypocrite? Well, deception is very helpful when it comes to hunting for food. But it is also helpful when hiding from a predator who is after you to make you their dinner. Perhaps it is instinctual for humans to pretend to be something we are not when facing danger, rejection, or when we come up against our own inadequacies.
- 4) For example, in 1817, Mary Baker passed herself off as Princess Caraboo from an unknown island that no one had ever heard of and had recently been taken over by pirates. She spoke a language that she made up and was translated by a friend who was in on the ruse.
- 5) Gerald Barnes, practiced medicine for 25 years and never went to medical school and certainly did not have a license. He practiced his procedures on chicken.
- 6) In 1920, Anna Anderson presented herself as the Grand Duchess Anastasia from the Russian Romanoff Dynasty. There were rumors that one of Romanoff's daughters had survived when the rest of the family was assassinated.
- 7) As a teenager in the '60s, Frank Abignale posed as a an airline pilot, doctor and other professions in order to pass more than 2.5 million dollars in bad checks. His story was told a few years back in the film "Catch Me if you Can" starring Leonardo Decaprio and Tom Hanks.
- 8) These, and many other people throughout history, have been exposed as actors, impostors and hypocrites.

B) *Ananias and Sapphira*

- 1) Two fresh graves outside the city walls sent a chill through the church in Jerusalem. Ananias and Sapphira were respected church members who, like everyone else, were new to the faith and had made a positive impact among the believers.
 - (a) *They were likely the kind of people who were the first to volunteer to high profile responsibilities.*
 - (b) *They quickly embraced the care of widows and orphans.*
 - (c) *They probably sang in the choir, taught the children and took the apostles out to dinner.*

- 2) Ananias and Sapphira were model Christians. Everybody knew them and liked them. So what went wrong? How is it possible that they were both dead?
 - (a) *Is God so jealous of our offerings that he will kill to get every penny he can get out of us?*
- 3) It is no wonder that the people of the first century church were shaken to the core. Capital punishment for a crime of greed seemed so severe, too severe. But there was more going on here than just a couple holding back part of their offering.

c) Barnabas and Ananias and Sapphira

- 1) It all started when Barnabas sold his ancestral property and gave the money as an offering. Ananias and Sapphira watched carefully at the accolades and respect that were given to this great man because of his selfless sacrifice.
- 2) Ananias and Sapphira were motivated by keeping up appearances and so, when they gave their offering, went through the motions of generosity.
- 3) John Piper a pastor and author put it this way.
 - (a) *Ananias and Sapphira stand for people who have not really been changed on the inside by being satisfied with all that God is for them in Christ, but who still want some place in the visible church. The reason they drop dead is not because this happens to all hypocrites. The reason they drop dead is to give a stunning warning to the whole church that phony Christians will all end up this way, sooner or later. Faking faith in the presence of God is a fearful thing.*
- 4) This should make us all sit up straight. Obviously, they completely underestimated God's tolerance for their lies and deception.
 - (a) *God is not deceived by the sin of trying to present ourselves as someone that we are not.*

D) Going through the motions

- 1) When you and I worship God only on the human level and never give ourselves fully to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit we are only going through the motions, just like Ananias and Sapphira.
- 2) So please consider the parable of "The Foolish Wallpaperer."

III) The Foolish Wallpaperer

A) Parable

- 1) A bright young college student got into his first apartment. The well worn calico shag carpet, yellow stained sinks and water stained ceiling did not squelch his enthusiasm to spruce up the place.
- 2) To cover the pin holes from posters, random fingerprints and pizza stains he decided to put up a trendy, flocked wallpaper. The masculine brown scrolls of fuzz were patterned in large stripes on a dull gold background. The boldness of the selection would hopefully detract the eye away from the large coffee stain in the middle of the floor.

- 3) The clerk who sold him the wall paper, paste, brush, smoother and utility knife put in a handy guide for the first time wallpaperer. The student gave it a cursory overview and decided that he had the general idea and used the guide as a coaster for his Pepsi. He was only doing one wall after all.
- 4) The logical place to start was the right corner. Spreading the paste on the nine foot scroll was more difficult than he thought. Frustrated but not defeated he finally got the first section up.
- 5) Fortunately, he bought an extra roll of wallpaper because when he matched up the pattern of the second piece with the first he ended up a foot short on one end. Discouraged but not defeated he cut a new one... extra long... 2 ½ feet extra long.
- 6) He learned quickly from his mistakes. The third, fourth and fifth pieces went up very fast as he learned the most efficient routines of cutting, pasting and smoothing. He even fantasized about hiring himself out as a wallpaperer to other students... for a price.
- 7) The sixth and last piece went up easily as well but there was a problem. He notice that the overlapping paper on the left side where the wall ended into the hallway had four inches more to trim at the top than at the bottom.
- 8) Taking his utility knife he trimmed the excess wallpaper from the ceiling, floor and side and then stood back to admire his handiwork. The wall looked great except for one thing, the stripes of fuzzy brown and gold were not going straight up and down. They were sort of leaning to the left!
- 9) "No one will notice" he thought as he cleaned away the wallpaper supplies. "Especially when the wall is accessorized by great art." With a carefully placed nail he hung the most expensive furnishing he owned, a large framed reprint of Dogs Playing Poker.
- 10) Stepping back to see the full effect he realized that straight up and down was now relative and so to diminish the effect of the leaning stripes he adjusted the picture to lean as well. "No one will notice," he thought, "especially when the furniture goes in."
- 11) The large uncomfortable couch with the thread bare arm rests fit nicely on the wall but the student could not escape the fact that it appeared to be sitting on a rather steep hill... nothing that an old biology and sociology book couldn't fix. Propping up the right side, the room once again had symmetry, until the floor lamp went in. It needed to be propped up also. The old trunk which served as a coffee table had to be jacked up to look right with the, picture, old couch and lamp.
- 12) The longer the student stared and the freshly papered wall, askew framed picture and propped up couch, lamp and trunk the more he felt like he was leaning as well. By wearing one of his 60s vintage platform shoes the problem was rectified. But after a while his back went out from poor posture. The foolish wallpaperer did not walk fully erect again until he finally graduated and moved out of the apartment.

B) Plumb line

- 1) The solution to the college student's problem was very simple. I should have used a plumb line at the very beginning of my wallpapering project. Oops, did I say "**my** wallpapering project." I meant **his** project.
- 2) A plumb line is a very simple building tool used since ancient times to measure true vertical. All you do is take a string and hang a weight from it. Then you hold the string against the wall and let the weight dangle freely until gravity has done its work and the weight comes to rest. When it does, the string marks true vertical.
- 3) Unfortunately, too many people approach the Christian life the same way I did wallpapering. They look at the goal of eternal life and think they know basically what they need to do.
 - (a) *They base their faith on what seems right to them and have not measured their life against heaven's true vertical. Like Ananias and Sapphira they mimic the Holy Spirit's work in their lives by human motives and actions.*
 - (b) *God is not deceived by this.*

c) Amos 7:4-8

- 1) **This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: The Sovereign LORD was calling for judgment by fire; it dried up the great deep and devoured the land. ⁵ Then I cried out, "Sovereign LORD, I beg you, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!"**
- 2) **⁶ So the LORD relented.**
"This will not happen either," the Sovereign LORD said. ⁷ This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸ And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?"
"A plumb line," I replied.
Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.
- 3) Now more than ever, non-believers look at Christians and see that their lives are leaning. Something is very wrong. These Christians say they have been changed by God but the changes look like all they have done is prop something up in their life to make it look better. The change is a human effort to look religious and not a divine transformation.
- 4) The truth is, people who have had a living encounter with Jesus are not perfect but they strive to measure their lives against the true vertical of God which is Jesus.
- 5) When you have a living encounter with Jesus, you will get one of two reactions from people who are not followers of Christ.
 - (a) *One, they will admire you or at least be curious about what it is that gives you joy and peace even when you go through difficult times. This is the Holy Spirit working through you.*
 - (b) *The second reaction is that they will hate you, and call you a hypocrite or worse because they are set against the cross of Christ and anyone who truly believes. Don't be surprised when this happens.*

D) Invitation preparation

- 1) In a few minutes I'm going to give you an opportunity to begin an authentic relationship with Jesus. Not one where you try to be good and look like, sound like and act like you think a follower of Jesus should be but a real, living relationship.
 - (a) *Ask yourself now, is my religion something that is based on my own ingenuity and desire to keep up certain appearances or do I have a real relationship with Christ where through the Holy Spirit I am being changed and transformed to be more like him?*
 - (b) *This is a question for all of us to ponder, even those of us who have been around church all of our lives. Are the changes in my life from God or am I just putting up a front to look like what I think a Christian should look like?*

IV) Authentic Christianity

A) Thomas Aquinas

- 1) His college classmates called him a "dumb ox" probably because he was quite fat. He had "dropsy" which made half his face droop and one of his eyes was much larger than the other. He was extremely introverted and quiet yet, against stiff opposition from his family he entered the priesthood.
- 2) In spite of all of his appearance deficits, Thomas Aquinas became the preeminent theologian of the 13th century. His writing was brilliant and insights provided theological bedrock that we still stand on today.
- 3) When nearing the end of writing what was to be his greatest and most important work, Aquinas put down his pen and never picked it up again. The section he was writing was a theological treatise on Jesus Christ.
- 4) One day while writing he had what can be best described as a personal, authentic encounter with Jesus. A vision that was so profound, so real, so life changing that everything that he had been doing, including writing his greatest work, now paled in importance to a living relationship with Christ.
- 5) What Thomas Aquinas discovered late in his life was the plumb line of God - the truth against which everything else is measured.
- 6) One of my pastoral heroes, Ray Stedman, said this in his book, Authentic Christianity.
 - (a) *Following his spiritual encounter with Jesus, Aquinas said, "I have seen that which makes all I have written and taught look small to me. My writing days are over." And with that, he simply stopped writing, leaving his theological masterpiece on Christ unfinished. All human pursuits--even the study of religion and theology--are mere pale imitations once we come into the presence of the Great Reality, Jesus Himself.*

B) Conversion

- 1) This is what it comes down to. You are not a Christian unless you meet Jesus. You cannot counterfeit your way into the kingdom of God by just looking like, sounding like and acting like a Christian.
 - (a) *You are not a follower of Jesus because you were raised in a Christian family, went to a Christian school, or go to a Christian church.*

- (b) *You are not a follower of Jesus because you read the Bible and pray, teach Sunday School, sing Christian songs or read Christian books.*
- (c) *You are not a follower of Jesus because you give money in the offering, volunteer to help the needy or anything else.*
- 2) 1 John 5:12 instructs us,
 - (a) *"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."*
- 3) The plumb line of an authentic Christian is a personal, living encounter with Jesus.
 - (a) *Some people meet Jesus gradually over the course of time. They may not remember a specific date where they met him, but they know they know him.*
 - (b) *Others meet Jesus dramatically, like Thomas Aquinas and Saul on the Road to Damascus. The encounter is sudden, and following the encounter, the person is not the same.*
 - (c) *Still others come kicking and screaming into the Kingdom of God when they realize that God himself has been shaking them at the core to get their attention.*
- 4) If you are feeling like a hypocrite this morning, get in line behind me because I sure do. We all do. The thing is, you can never know enough, be good enough, moral enough, or do enough to find favor with God apart from knowing Christ. What you and I need is to personally meet Jesus.

v) Conclusion

A) *Living in fear*

- 1) I don't know why God used such an extreme measure with Ananias and Sapphira to make his point, but he did.
- 2) What we need to take away from that story is the sober reminder that **authentic Christianity cannot be faked.**
 - (a) *God sees our hearts and the motives behind our attitudes and actions.*
- 3) So how do we know if we are being authentic in our Christian life?

B) *Authentic Christianity*

- 1) The true test is to ask, **"On what or who am I measuring my life?"**
 - (a) *God has dropped down a plumb line from heaven who is Jesus. He is our true vertical. He is the only one worthy to build your life on – to measure your life against.*

C) *Invitation*

- 1) I want to invite you to personally meet Jesus.
 - (a) *He longs to have a real relationship with you. He will give to you the Holy Spirit to live in you to guide you, comfort you, convict you, teach you and transform you to be more like him.*
- 2) This is what it means to be an authentic Christian.
- 3) Jesus knows the true desires of your heart and will gladly come to meet with you.

vi) Prayer

- 1) Lord Jesus Christ, we humbly come to you. We come at your invitation to have a real and living relationship with you. A friendship that is deep and intimate. An encounter that is life changing because you do something miraculous in us and we don't put up any fronts.
- 2) I pray for the person that you are speaking to right now.
 - (a) *The person who longs for a relationship with you but is afraid what other people will think.*
 - (b) *I pray for the person who has never really thought about you before but for the first time, can tell that you are talking right to them.*
- 3) Lord, for everyone that you are offering yourself to right now, help them to say, "yes" to you right now.
 - (a) *Yes, I want to know you, Jesus.*
 - (b) *Yes, I want to be the person you want me to be.*
 - (c) *Yes, I want to follow you and trust you.*
 - (d) *Yes, I am ready to begin a real relationship with you.*
- 4) **If you know Jesus is speaking to you and you are saying, "yes" I invite you to repeat this prayer silently in your heart.**
- 5) Lord Jesus, I invite you into my life. I am ready to let go of all my conceptions of what it means to be religious and want to have a real relationship with you.
 - (a) *I confess that I have thought, said and done things that are not pleasing to you. I am sure that I deserve a worse punishment than Ananias and Sapphira but you are merciful.*
 - (b) *There is a lot of garbage in my life that I don't know how to deal with – stuff that only God can deal with, so I ask you to forgive my sin and begin to clean me up on the inside.*
 - (c) *I want to know you on your terms and not my own. I want to learn to know what your voice sounds like so that when you talk to me on the inside, I know it's you.*
 - (d) *I want to learn to see the world as you see it. I want to become more like you everyday.*
- 6) Jesus, I believe that you are the Son of God. I believe that you died on the cross for my sin and have risen from the dead. I believe that you are alive and hear me as I pray. I believe that you will give me the Holy Spirit as you have promised to those who believe.
 - (a) *Send your Holy Spirit to live in me, to guide me, comfort me, convict me, teach me and transform me into a child of God.*
- 7) I believe, Lord Jesus, that you have heard my words but more importantly, you see my heart. I claim the promise that because I have opened the door of my life to you that you have come in and that I am now a Child of God.

- 8) I thank you for inviting me to be a part of your family. I don't deserve your love and mercy but I accept them as gladly as gifts. I look forward to the journey through life that we will now take together.
- 9) I pray this, not by my own power or imagination but in the powerful name of Jesus.

B) Welcome

- 1) While still in a posture of prayer, if you have sincerely prayed this prayer in your heart just now, you are a child of God, you have said, yes to God's plumb line. If you have said yes to God, I want ask you to simply raise your hand. You are not raising your hand to me but as an outward expression to God which says, I am saying, "yes" to you.
- 2) It is very important to tell someone what you have done so that they can encourage you in your relationship with Christ. As we sing this song I want to invite anyone who needs prayer to take advantage of the opportunity to pray with one of your Prayer Companions.

VII) Song: Lord, I Want to Be Like Jesus

1) 1. Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart,
in my heart,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart,

In my heart, in my heart,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.

2. Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart,
in my heart,
Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart,

In my heart, in my heart,
Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart.

3. Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart,
in my heart,
Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart,

In my heart, in my heart,
Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart.

1. Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart,
in my heart,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart,

In my heart, in my heart,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.

Lord, I want to be more holy in my heart,
Lord, I want to be more loving in my heart,
Lord, I want to be like Jesus in my heart.

VIII)Benediction

- 1) 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Go now as authentic people who are being transformed by the power of God to be like Jesus, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.