

# Synthetic Christianity

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Verse 1,

1 And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3 and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. 4 Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' 5 But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. 6 And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. 7 But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. 9 Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' 10 So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11 But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

May God bless this word to our hearts. Let's pray.

*Father, please speak to us through your word this day. Forgive us our sins, Lord. Use your word in spite of ourselves. Use it in all of its power and majesty to accomplish your purposes. We ask in Christ's name. Amen.*

I wonder if you've ever noticed some Christians will walk miles in the heat to hear God's word for half a day, some will not take a 20 minute ride in comfort to sit in a 90 minute, air-conditioned service. Some Christians will risk prison to assemble with their brothers and sisters, some will not miss a television movie. Some Christians who have very little

will give half of it to the Lord, some who have very much will not give him a tenth. Some Christians will cross oceans to tell others of Jesus, some won't cross the hall of their apartment building. Some Christians quickly put behind the sins of the flesh, some never seem to part with them. Some will face death for their faith, some will not face a friend's disapproval.

According to one poll several years ago, among Americans 18 or older, 81% consider themselves Christians. Approximately 8 out of 10 American adults consider themselves to be Christians yet only 42% of them could correctly answer this question: who delivered the Sermon on the Mount? And only 46% of them could give the names of the first 4 books of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Even allowing for those Christians who may be very young in their faith, that is those who may be true Christians but just uninstructed babies in Christ, do not these statistics and your own experiences suggest that there are a great many counterfeit Christians in our culture? Is the bulk of American Christianity the real thing? Is it authentic or is it synthetic? Is it woven with genuine lambswool or with polyester?

The intermixing of the false and the true, the genuine and the counterfeit, is not a new problem in the church of Jesus Christ. Jonathan Edwards in his classic work "The Religious Affections" first published in 1746 wrote, "It is by the mixture of counterfeit religion with true, not discerned and distinguished, that the devil has had his greatest advantage against the cause and kingdom of Christ all along hitherto. It is by this means principally that he has prevailed against all the revivings of religion that ever have been since the first founding of the Christian church. By this, he hurt the cause of Christianity in and after the apostolic age much more than by all the persecutions of both Jews and heathens. The apostles in all their letters show themselves much more concerned at the former mischief, that is, counterfeit Christians, than the latter persecution. By this, Satan prevailed against the Reformation begun by Luther, Zwingli and others, to put a stop to its progress and bring it into disgrace. Ten times more than by all those bloody, cruel and before unheard of persecutions of the church of Rome. By this principally, Satan has prevailed against revivals of religion that have been in our nation," he writes, "since the Reformation."

Counterfeit Christianity is nothing new. Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares," that is weeds, "among the wheat. But when the grain the tares appeared and the servants of the," master, "the owner came and said to him, 'Where did these tares come from? Didn't you sow good seed in the field?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' 'Do you want us to go and gather them up?' 'No, lest you uproot the wheat in the process. Let both," the seed and the weeds, "grow together until the harvest, then the tares," or the weeds, "will be gathered and burned but the wheat will be gathered into my barn," he said. Jesus explained the parable, he said, "The sower of the good seed is the Jesus himself. The field is the world," he said, "the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom," believers, "the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels," Matthew 13.

Genuine Christianity is marked by a radical change, a new creation. Old things are passed away. It is life altering, life dominating submission to Christ's lordship. As we read just a few of the demands that Jesus places on his followers, ask yourself how this squares with much of modern, at least American, Christianity including your own faith. First of all, think about the temporal sacrifice involved in following Jesus. Matthew 10:34, the temporal sacrifice involved in following him. Jesus says, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

Turn over to Mark 8. Look at verse 34, "When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, 'Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.'"

One more reference, Mark 10:23, "Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!' And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, 'Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, 'Who then can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.' Then Peter began to say to Him, 'See, we have left all and followed You.' So Jesus answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time - houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions - and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.'"

Jesus made it very clear here and in many other places that there is temporal sacrifice involved in following him. That's why he described it as taking up your cross and following him. There are persecutions involved. There is affliction involved. We must count the cost, he said. There is temporal sacrifice. Now, of course, that temporal sacrifice will be greater in cultures where Christianity is not permitted. We have a Christian base in our land; we live in a country that tolerates Christianity but there is, nonetheless, sacrifice involved in following Christ even here.

Secondly, consider the requirement of holiness in those who follow Jesus. Three references from Matthew 5. Look at Matthew 5 and look at verse 17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Look at verse 27, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell."

And verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Should it not be evident to us that with the standards of sacrifice and the standards of holiness for true Christians set this high, we should be striving for perfection? If my right hand causes me to sin, I should cut it off, that's how I should view sin. If my right eye causes me to lust, I should pluck it out, that's how evil sin is. With the standard set so high, with the bar set so high, the bar for holiness, should it not be evident to us that given that and given the morality of America presently so low, many of that 81% of adult Americans who claim to be Christians have a false assurance and thus, a synthetic Christianity? Synthetic Christianity manifests itself in this way: there is no putting to death of the old man; no hunger for holiness; no hatred of sin; no willingness to suffer loss for Jesus' sake. The Apostle Paul said, "Our old man was crucified with him that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. Likewise," he says, "you also reckon yourself," that is, consider yourselves, "to be dead indeed unto sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal bodies that you should obey it in its lust for sin shall not have dominion over you. I am crucified with Christ," Paul said. In synthetic Christianity, not only is the old man not crucified with Christ, not only is the old man not being put to death, he's fat and he's happy thus there is an allurements with the things of this world system: its philosophy, its ethics, its pleasures, its attractions. I wonder, friend, isn't that true of you?

You adulterers and adulteresses, know you not that friendship with the world is enmity with God?

There is a pride in worldly attainments. Paul said, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but refuse that I may win Christ." Is that true of you?

There is an unwillingness to sacrifice for Jesus' sake. "Demas has forsaken me," Paul said, "having loved this present age." Is that true of you? Unwillingness to sacrifice for Christ?

There is an unwillingness to confess Christ before men in synthetic Christianity. Stephen confessed Jesus before the religious leaders of Israel, the very ones who put Jesus to death heedless of the consequences but in synthetic Christianity, there is no holy boldness. Is that true of anyone here?

In synthetic Christianity, there is a careless entanglement with this world's affairs. "No man that wars and tangles himself in the affairs of this life that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier." Is that true of anyone here?

There is little or no love for God's word. "O, how I love thy law. It is my meditation day and night," the Psalmist cries. There is little or no love for God's people. "We know that we pass from death unto life because we love the brethren," 1 John 3:14. Their lives in synthetic Christianity are not characterized by love and joy and peace and patience and gentleness and goodness and faith and meekness and self-control but rather lives in synthetic Christianity are characterized by adultery and fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, wrath, factions, seditions, drunkenness. Is that true of anyone here?

In synthetic Christianity, there is a continuance in what God declares to be sin. "Whosoever is born of God doth not practice sin." That is, he does not continue in it. It is not his lifestyle. He falls into it. He immediately recognizes it as sin and he repents of it, turns from it. "He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk even as he walked. He that says I know him and does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him," 1 John 2:4.

Now, what are the causes of this sad state of affairs in the Christian world? What are the causes of this sad state of affairs, at least in America, where so many of us declare that we follow Jesus but show little or no evidence of it? Surely, the most glaring reason our American culture is plagued with synthetic Christianity is, as you know, the great apostasy that has occurred over the last hundred years or so. There was a time when virtually every major Protestant denomination not only agreed on paper in their creeds with the fundamentals of the faith shared by all true Christians but they proclaimed as with one voice the depravity of man; the necessity of the new birth; justification by faith alone; the deity of Jesus Christ. But since that great apostasy, that great falling away, great numbers of professing Christians have only a very vague idea of what being a

Christian even means. Somehow many of us think it's patterning our lives after Jesus, that's what we need. They do not believe in nor have they experienced what the Bible calls the new birth. While 81% of Americans believe they are Christians, only 38% of them say they have been born again. 38% of the 81% say they have been born again or had a turning point in their lives when they committed themselves to Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again," unless a man is born again, "he cannot see the kingdom of God."

So this accounts then for roughly half of those Americans who will say they are Christians. Without having experienced the new birth, they are not Christians in the biblical sense and that's the only sense that matters. But this still leaves 38% of all Americans who believe they are Christians, approximately, polls will differ but it's somewhere between 30 and 40% of Americans, I believe, claim to be Christians and claim to be born again Christians. They declare that they have experienced the new birth. Now think about it: what do you think our society would be like if fully 38% of us were genuinely born again Christians who had been turned from darkness to light?

In the book "Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and The Remaking of American Religion," scholar Wade Clark Roof and his associates attempted to take the pulse of modern American Christianity, particularly among the baby boomer generation of which I am a part. Columnist Terry Mattingly summarized their findings. He said, "A third of America's baby boomers call themselves born again Christians but only half of them," and then he linked to a conservative Protestant denomination. "Many believe they have made a spiritual decision that is right for them but not necessarily for everyone. Half of them affirmed that the various religions of the world are 'equally good and true.' A third of the born again believers said they believe in reincarnation. A third of the born again believers say they believe in astrology. 48% of them said 'yes' when they were asked this question: should a married woman who doesn't want any more children be able to obtain a legal abortion? Virtually half of them, the born again believers in America, those who declare themselves to be born again that is, virtually half of them said that a married woman who doesn't want any more children should be able to have a legal abortion."

Now, if you agree with me that it appears that there are many people in our generation who are walking around thinking they are born again Christians who are in fact not, what accounts for this? What accounts for this? Now, Jesus said that Satan would plant weeds in with the wheat so we know who's behind it. What I want us to think about for a few moments is: how has he gone about it? How has Satan accomplished this? As I said, I believe that liberal Christianity, that is, the denial of the fundamentals of the faith, accounts for maybe half of the large number of Americans who believe they are Christians. Such churches no longer preach the Gospel nor do they talk about the new birth and in surveys done of the pastors of many of these churches, most of them don't identify themselves as having been born again. This is why denominations such as the PCA are diligent to defend the great truths of the deity of Christ; the depravity of man; justification by faith. We count ourselves among many churches in this nation, among many denominations in our country that's endeavoring to maintain the truth of the word of God.

But how do we account for so many who consider themselves born again Christians who give evidence of no genuine change? I believe that the message and the methods of modern evangelicalism bear some responsibility here. First of all, the message. I believe that modern evangelicalism has in great part diffused the power of the Gospel message in a misguided effort to make it more palatable to more people.

The message of the Bible is: you are desperate sinners headed for hell. The message of the evangelical churches: you need Jesus to give you more joy and fulfillment.

The message of the Bible is: repent and believe the Gospel. The message of the church is: just believe, you may or may not repent later.

The message of the Bible is: you must transfer your faith to Jesus Christ alone and embrace him as your Lord and your Savior, your Master. You must take up your cross and follow him and you should count the cost because there is a cost. He must become Lord of your life. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house," Acts 16:31. The message of the church in our day oftentimes is: just accept Jesus into your heart, later you may choose to make him Lord of your life or not.

The message of the Bible is: if you follow Jesus, you will have hardship, strife, persecution, the hatred of the world along with the blessings of knowing Christ, the personal joy of the Holy Spirit, etc. A lot of things that are very positive but also there will be persecution but you will have eternal joy in his presence. "At thy right hand there is pleasure forevermore." The message of the church is: if you accept Jesus as your Savior, you'll have all good things in this life and eternal life.

The message of the Bible is: without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. The message of the church is: once you accept Jesus as your Savior, you can live an ungodly life and still go to heaven.

The message of the Bible is: God's righteous law is to be proclaimed to drive men to Christ as a standard and as a standard for holy living. The message of the Bible is: the law of God should be proclaimed to drive men and women to Christ. When I hear the law expounded and I realize that to commit adultery is not just to commit the act, it's to lust in the heart. When I hear the law expounded and I see that to murder is not just to commit the act but to have hatred and anger in my heart towards my brother. When I see that I have broken God's laws, every one of them in my heart if not in action, I am driven then to realize that I am a lost sinner headed for judgment and it drives me to the cross. What hope do I have? I cannot stand on my own merits. I deserve the wrath of a holy God. So it drives me to Christ. The law is our schoolmaster to drive us to Christ. He shows us where we're wrong and drives us to the Savior. The message of the church is: the law is of no use to us. That's Old Testament stuff.

Pastor Walter Chantry put it this way: "Though unintentionally so, deceit marks many modern invitations to Christ. Audiences are reminded that they are sad, lonely,

discouraged and unsuccessful, life is a great weight to them, troubles encompass them, the future holds dark threats. Then sinners are invited to come to Christ who will change all of that and put a smile on their faces. He's pictured as a cosmic psychologist who will patch up all the problems in one session on the inquiry room couch. There is no reminder of the discipline which Christ demands, no suggestions given that following Jesus is sacrificial or painful. It isn't surprising that many who go forward to try the modern Gospel pill are never seen from again. They react like a young military recruit. The recruiting sergeant told him about seeing the world, about honor and fortune and training but nothing was said of early rising, forced marches, KP duty. There was no mention of the blood, fire and terror of the battlefield. Sometimes a young convert after a few days of professing Christ wakes up to discover that troubles are compounded. The psychological honeymoon has ended so quickly. Thinking that he was duped by the dreamy promise of the evangelist, he is never seen again."

We have tried so hard to make the Gospel acceptable. We've tried to force those narrow gates open wider and the effect is we have thousands of people, I think perhaps millions of people, walking around thinking that they are saved although they've never been brought under the conviction of the law of God. Have never genuinely repented of their sins. Have never laid hold upon Christ alone not only as Savior but as Lord of their lives. They have never cried out to God in repentance. They've never fallen before Jesus and acknowledged him as Lord. They have never experienced the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They haven't put away sinful practices, sinful habits. They don't love the word. They don't love the saints. They don't love the church. They continue to live in virtually every respect as the worldly men and women who do not profess faith in Christ.

Pastor John MacArthur tells this story and he says, "I spent some time once with a fellow minister who drove me through his city. We passed a large liquor store and I happened to mention that it was an unusual looking place. 'Yes,' he said, 'there is a chain of those stores around the city all owned by one man. He is a member of my Sunday school class,' the pastor said. I wondered aloud what the man was like and the minister replied, 'Oh, he's quite faithful. He's in class every week.' 'Does it bother him that he owns all of these liquor stores?' I asked? 'Well, we've talked about it some,' the pastor said, 'but he feels like people are going to buy liquor anyway so why not buy from him.' I asked, 'Well, what is his life like?' 'Well, he did leave his wife and he's been living with a young girl,' the minister replied. Then after several minutes of my bewildered and uncomfortable silence," MacArthur says, "the pastor added, 'You know, sometimes it's hard for me to understand how a Christian can live like that.'" MacArthur said, "I must confess that it is hard for me to understand how someone who teaches the Bible can assume that a man living in rebellion against God is a Christian merely because he claims to be."

How many such people have been duped by Satan, by their own deceitful hearts and by misguided pastors and evangelists to believe that they are Christians simply because they accepted Jesus, words that don't even occur in Scripture. When they have never recognized themselves as sinners headed for judgment, repented with genuine, godly sorrow, words that do appear in Scripture, believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and



Lord of their lives, the one who calls the shots, transferring their trust from themselves to Jesus Christ alone, endeavoring to live a life of obedience and holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they've never been regenerated, never been born from above because the first thing that happens when you're regenerated is you repent.

I was raised in one of those liberal churches I spoke of a few moments ago, many of you know. If you had asked me, in fact, if I had been surveyed when I was 19 or 20, I would have said I was a Christian. I think I would have known the first 4 books of the New Testament but some of those other questions I probably would have gotten wrong but I wasn't trusting in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I believed Jesus was a good man who did good things and someone to pattern my life after. I have an understanding of those who sit under that kind of teaching, I sat under that sort of teaching. My father sat under that sort of teaching. My brothers, my sisters, sat under that teaching. It wasn't until I was born again, it wasn't until the power of God worked in my heart and opened my eyes, took away my stony heart, gave me a heart of flesh, took away my blind eyes and gave me eyes that could see. It wasn't until I was born again, regenerated by the power of the Gospel, the Gospel message and the Holy Spirit applying it to my heart. It wasn't until then that I looked at myself and saw my sin for what it was. I saw that I was proud and selfish. I saw that I deserved the wrath of God. Before that I thought I was pretty good.

The first thing that happens when a person is regenerated is he sees himself as a sinner and he turns from that sin in disgust. He sees Jesus in all his holiness and purity and he lays hold upon him by faith. That's becoming a Christian. That's the new life. That's why Jesus said, "Unless that happens to you, you cannot see the kingdom of heaven." And when that happens to a person, what happens to his sin? It's laid upon Jesus Christ alone. It's taken away. It's forgiven. What happens to that man's life? The Holy Spirit comes inside, begins to live inside of him. He begins to sanctify him. That man now has a distaste for sin and the Holy Spirit is living inside of him and saying, "Well, you know, when you talk to your mother that way, that was sin. And you know, when you yelled at your wife, that was sin. And when you lusted there, that was sin. And when you partook of these sins of the flesh whether it's drunkenness or drugs or whatever, you see, that's sin too because you're supposed to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength." So what happens? The Holy Spirit indwells the new Christian and he begins to live a holy life. That's why the Bible can say, "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." Why? Because if you don't have holiness, that shows you've not been regenerated. It's not the holiness that brings us to heaven, it's the new birth that makes us more holy and if we don't have the fruits, then that evidences that we don't have the life.

It's not just the message of the modern American church, it's also the methods that have helped lead so many into false assurance and, Lord willing, we'll talk a bit about that next week. But as we close this morning, I want to ask you: search your heart, remember what Jesus said? "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" It doesn't matter whether you have all the wealth in the world if you lose your soul. So search your heart. Do you have authentic Christianity? Have you experienced authentic Christianity? Can you point to a point in your life when you realized you were a

sinner and you repented of that sin and you laid hold upon Jesus Christ alone? Have you ever transferred your trust from yourself to Jesus? Have you been born again? You see, Jesus said, "If you haven't, you'll never see the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God."

Is your Christianity authentic or synthetic? Have you taken up your cross to follow him? Do you have a personal, living relationship with a personal Savior? With a living Savior? Or are you going to attempt to slip into that wedding feast without having on the wedding garment provided by the host of the feast? If so, God's word to you is: repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.

Let's pray.