

Authentic Christianity

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I Corinthians 3:18-19

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness."

This week I read about a Christian college professor who spoke about a sex-dating app that was the craze of this particular Christian campus. This is an app where you can scroll profiles under the auspices of online dating to find one-night stands, some using it more than once a night. I then read another article from a leading national magazine interviewing 20-somethings who use these apps. One young man, an investment banker, said it was like ordering fast food and delivery on-line, only in this case, "you're ordering a person." It was so heartbreaking that I could feel myself slip into a dark despair. The depths of immorality sickened me. I had no idea that something like this was happening. And to think that a Christian college campus was not immune to this kind of behavior was what pained me most.

This is a very stark illustration of how much of what calls itself Christianity is involved in worldly popular culture. But the comparison should not stop at the Christian university campus. No, the comparison could be made to many Christian organizations including many, many local churches. The spirit of this present evil age has an influence even on you and me. We do not know what authentic Christianity is because we so seldom see it. And if we see it, we are confused and are not sure if it is authentic or an aberration, an abnormal form of the Christian faith.

True Christianity will always draw a stark contrast to its environment, even a religious environment. Authentic Christianity is very different and is never at home in its surrounding. It can't be. It's so different from what the world says. But also it's so different from what many conservative "Bible believing" churches think. This is why the Apostle Peter addressed believers in his first epistle as "pilgrims," which does not mean men with tall black hats and buckled shoes and have Thanksgiving feasts with Indians. No, it means someone who temporarily lives in a strange or foreign place. It means someone who is an exile, an alien, who will always be different and never be at home here.

In our text the Apostle Paul distinguishes the stark contrast between the wisdom of God from the wisdom of the world's elite and educated. I want to show you today that it is these differences that will always make authentic Christianity recognizable because it stands in such contrast to its environment, even then religious environment of its time.

I. THE WORLD WILL ALWAYS DESPISE AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY

Jesus said, "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake" (Luke 21:17). He warned us that men would speak evil of us falsely because of Him.

Paul, in the first three chapters of this epistle has been using as a subtheme, wisdom. He's been contrasting the wisdom of God with the wisdom of the ages, the wisdom of the world. Our text is basically the summation of this subtheme of wisdom in the first three chapters. You can come to only one conclusion: the wisdom of God and the wisdom of men cannot come together. They cannot be mixed. They never will. Look at verse 18.

"Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool"

When the Bible says, "don't be deceived" or "let no one deceive himself," it's always because it's easy to be deceived, especially at this point. The author wants you to understand there is no deception here. It's clear there is no mixing of the two, you can know whether you are authentically His or not.

What does he mean, "let him become a fool"? What Paul is saying is this, authentic Christianity is so radically different from the natural mind and it will be foolish to them. So if you are a wise person, an intelligent person, a knowledgeable person, you're going to have to humble yourself, swallow your pride, and be ready to be called a fool for Christ's sake. That's what Paul is saying here. The world rejects authentic Christianity because it sees it as sheer nonsense.

A. The World Would Accept Christianity If Christianity Solved Social Problems For the World.

If the church could come up with a solution to war and peace, ah, then they would applaud us.

If we could solve the racial tensions, they would accept us.

If we could answer the question of poverty, they would extend the hand to us.

But Christianity was not called to answer these social ills. It was not called to solve the issue of poverty. In fact, Jesus said, “The poor you have with you always.” *Yes, but didn't Jesus say His church would be salt and light and isn't salt a preservative with healing powers?* Yes, that's true, salt has some medicinal purposes and it does preserve. *Aren't we then to be a preservative for society?* Yes. But not in the way most people think. The social problem of today is not poverty, it's not war, it's not crime, it's not drugs. The social ill and problem of this generation has been the problem of every generation preceding us and it's the problem of man's nature—his heart. The heart is the problem. The heart is totally opposed to God, conceived in iniquity, born in sin. You and I are naturally rebels to God and from this fountain springs all of the social ills and problems. God does not call us to address poverty or war and peace or all of these other problems, He says go to the root. The systemic root of all of this is our heart, our nature. That's the problem, our nature does not love God nor is inclined toward Him.

If you were suffering a heart attack and were rushed into the ER and the doctor happened to know you had an ingrown toenail and he forgot about your heart and started to fix your ingrown toenail what would you think of him? Foolishness, derelict of duty! We have a message. We are to be salt and light to our generation but our message addresses the problem they don't want addressed. The salt and light is always Christ in us and Him alone.

A college professor in a prestigious university came to know the Lord. Before he was saved he would always have lunch with a particular colleague. They would discuss world events and philosophy. After he was converted he tried to share his newfound faith with his colleague but she would have nothing of it and they would always breakout into argument. One day he decided he wouldn't bring it up at all, in fact, he wouldn't say anything. He would just mind his own business, be quiet, and eat his lunch. He could tell she was becoming irritated and finally she couldn't hold it in any longer and she burst out, “Even when you are silent you are a living accusation!”

That's it. Authentic Christianity is always a living accusation. Even when we're silent the light of the glory of the Gospel in the face of Jesus Christ penetrates the dark heart and the dark heart does not like it. We are contrary to that for which they stand and they label us fools. Why would

anybody want to give up happiness and live as they characterize us, “a mundane, ordinary life”? They say of us, “They’re just a bunch of prudes; who wants to give up a Sunday morning and sit with a bunch of people who have neglected joy and pleasure and don’t know how to have fun?” But what they don’t know is this, we have tapped into joy that Peter calls “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” We have tasted of something that takes pleasure to the highest of all levels. “In Thy presence is fullness of joy and at Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11).

B. The World Would Accept Christianity if Christianity Were Merely Psychological.

Like insomnia, if we could just help people sleep and put their conscience at ease. If we had a solution to the ills of depression and other psychological disorders they would love us. If we could help people feel better about themselves, then the world would accept you and I. Many church leaders have bought into this lie. The Joel Osteens and the Joyce Meyers are trying to tell us if you simply believe in yourself more, if you just have more confidence, if you could just believe truth and think accordingly. We ought to believe truth but it is very important what truth we’re talking about. The truth of authentic Christianity is not in self-promotion but in the exaltation of Jesus Christ and Him alone and knowing Him personally, relationally. This is the answer. Many church leaders advocate a more progressive theology, which means a popular lie replacing an offensive truth.

C. The World Would Accept Christianity if Christianity Was Limited to Worship Services.

We’re hearing this on a great scale since the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage, aren’t we? We’re being told that it’s alright for you Christians to be bigoted and hateful and to have your strange doctrine so long as you keep them in a place of worship. Just the other day I heard a secularist say this very thing arguing with someone who was against same-sex marriage and said, “That’s discrimination. You shouldn’t talk like this. We will not have this in a secular society.” And they won’t. They will try to silence you and I. *If you could just learn to compromise and get along. Go ahead and just have your worship services and say what you believe to one another, but don’t you dare take it to the marketplace.* Beloved, authentic Christianity cannot compromise with the world around it. It cannot. There is no doubt, I really am not concerned about authentic Christianity bending the knee to popular theology or the immorality of the times. I’m not concerned about that. Why? Because it cannot do it—it’s not in its heart or makeup.

II. THE WORLD DESPISES CHRISTIANITY BECAUSE CHRISTIANITY CONTRADICTS THE MAJOR WORLD PHILOSOPHIES

Philosophy of the world = Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, be your own man, be your own woman, don't succumb to anybody, assert yourself.

Philosophy of Jesus = If any man wants to come after Me, let him first deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow Me.

A. Individualism.

Jesus cuts against the grain of human pride. To the natural man it doesn't make sense, it's totally preposterous. *What do you mean "deny yourself"?* No. *You're to promote yourself. Nobody else will do it. You better do it. The way to get ahead is by asserting yourself. Be aggressive. Stand up.* And yet Jesus says if you want to be His and have eternal life you have to learn how to abase yourself, be humble, totally contrary to the world.

B. World Societies and Communities.

The world has its societies and communities and they say, "This is the way, this is the way to a better life. You've got to be apart of this organization or this society." Men want us to turn to politics, as if this was the answer. The Moral Majority of the past was a false hope. It's like trying to grab a rope of sand, it could not change this country. Now we're told to believe in higher education, we're told to believe in other organizations of man.

Only one organization, one organism God endorses and He's the head of it—the church of Jesus Christ. Once again, that doesn't make sense to the world.

III. THE WORLD DESPISES CHRISTIANITY'S RATIONALE

The wisdom of this world is silly, foolish, utter idiocy to God because God thinks on a plane much different than the natural man. And so do you if you're saved. The Bible says we have the mind of Christ. You and I are to think on a different wavelength than the man or woman who is yet to be saved, and this is the problem.

A. Christianity is Illogical to the World.

Young people say Christianity can't be what they're looking for because _____. What are their reasons for believing this?

Christians don't know how to enjoy themselves.

They always want to put rules and regulations on you.

They always want to tie you down and not let you express yourself.

My dear friend, listen, it's in the Gospel that you truly find yourself. But that is countercultural. It's counter to the way we think. We think the answer lies with man.

Look at I Corinthians 1:22-23. Here Paul is giving an illustration of the utter nonsense the world thinks of when it thinks of the Gospel or hears it.

“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-23)

Jews wanted miracles in order to believe. “Just show us some great display of power and we'll believe.” In John six they approach Jesus and said, “Moses gave us bread in the wilderness, give us bread from heaven, do a great miracle and we will follow You and make You our King.” He was always accosted with this line of reasoning. The religious leaders said, “Show us some great sign.” Even on the cross they mocked Him. “Come down and we'll believe in You. Do a miracle, bring Yourself off the cross and we'll follow You.” The Jews always wanted a sign.

The Greeks, on the other hand, were not interested in the miraculous but the intellect. “Give us a philosophy, a brilliant philosophical argument that demolishes all other arguments and we'll believe and follow You.”

But what did God give the Jew and the Greek? He gave them a dead Messiah. Utter foolishness to them. How could a man who dies on a cross save me and give me eternal life? What hope for society is He when this man is being crucified as a criminal? That doesn't make sense. Why, He

didn't own anything but the clothes on His back and you're telling me He's going to give me all riches? He had no home of His own and you're telling me He's going to reserve a home in heaven for me? This doesn't make sense. What kind of King is He to be born in a manger and not in the palace? Utter foolishness to the natural mind.

Godly wisdom is so countercultural that we sometimes miss it, even those of us in the church. Let me give you five examples of what I'm talking about.

B. Godly Wisdom Says:

I. God wins by dying.

God triumphs by dying, by losing.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)

What does he mean? He means that God in His greatest display of weakness, in His display of losing everything, triumphs over all. He explains in verse 25 what he's saying here,

“The foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

You and I both agree God is not foolish at all, nor is He weak. He's the omnipotent God, He has all-power. What Paul is trying to say is that God appearing as weak as death on a cross, as foolish as that might appear, God at His weakest is still strong enough to defeat Satan and your sins. God appearing at His most foolish is still wiser than the wisest of men. By His death He conquered all principalities and powers and brought them under His feet as His footstool. God, in His weakest moment, there hanging on the cross, is strong enough to conquer every stain of sin, every power of rebellion, every resistance of this hard heart of mine. He can do it. This is what mankind doesn't understand.

God does exactly the opposite of how we think. He sends His Son to die, born of a virgin, nobody to herald Him except a few angels and shepherds. He lives His life in obscurity. He's mocked by the religious establishment, hated by the political forces, and finally crucified and silenced on the cross, and we say, “How can that be victory? How can there be hope in that?”

Then God raises Him from the dead three days later.

Both Jews and Gentiles mocked Paul for talking about the resurrection. In Acts 17 when he's in Athens speaking to the great philosophers of his age they called him a babblers. It's a word that means literally *seed picker*. It means somebody that picks here and picks there and brings it all together, ties it up, and tries to offer it as something substantial. The philosophers invited Paul nonetheless to go to the debating arena called Mars Hill and they listened. He even quoted their own poets and talked in a way they could understand, in a way that was relevant until he got to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Then the Bible says they went away mocking him. Why? The death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is foolishness to this world.

In the second chapter of I Corinthians, Paul says the wisdom he is talking about is still a mystery. This is something not even the Stephen Hawkings or the brilliant Albert Einsteins can understand. Did you know Albert Einstein didn't claim to be religious but the more he studied the theory of relativity and began to understand he came to the conclusion that there had to be some kind of intelligent design. He even mocked Christians of his era saying to the affect that if Christians knew what he knew about God, they would live completely different. They would live in awe of God. Here's a man who doesn't know God and yet just looking at His creation and seeing the amazement of the mathematic structures that God put into place, he recognized the awe and wonder and majesty of God.

“However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing.⁷ But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,⁸ which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”
(1 Corinthians 2:6-8)

Paul says the wisdom of God is a mystery even to the most educated man. And it's always that way because God never does it the way we do it. “My thoughts are not your thoughts,” His thoughts are above ours. He doesn't think on the same plane. He's not limited. He knows all things, every contingency, and He knows all about your life. He knows what you're facing today. He knows what your ailments are and He knows how it will all end. Time is in His hands. He transcends above it. He knows the issues you're facing and because He knows all things He can be trusted.

Do you know all things? Can you foresee every decision and the pathway it will lead you? No. You hope you can. You hope that decision will make you more successful or bring to you the happiness you're looking for, but in the end you can't guarantee that. Why? Because you don't know all things. A hundred different things could take place. A thousand and one different contingencies exist. But God knows. He knows enough to know how to help you. But we don't think that way.

2. You must lose your life to save your life.

Once again, this stands to man's thinking as utter folly. "What do you mean you've got to lose your life in order to save it?" That's exactly what Jesus said.

"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.²⁶ For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:25-26)

Everyone of us have something native, natural to us that wants to hold onto control and never relinquish it. That's why we don't like authority. That's why your children don't want to do what you tell them to do. It's something born in them, instilled in them that is natural to them. We don't like authority because it means we have to submit our control to the authority of Jesus who said, "If you want to have life, if you want to save your life then you're going to have to lose the control and give it to Me." That's totally contrary to the way you and I think. That's why there is someone in this room today who is not yet a Christian because you cannot understand this principle. It seems so contrary, not only to your rationale but to your emotions, your wants, your loves, your hates. Everything in you is opposed to that.

Yet God can be trusted. If you will obey Him He will save your life. Not only will He save it, He's promised to give you life and life more abundantly.

3. Christianity thrives when it suffers.

The more it suffers the better it does. Mao Zedong proved that. In the late '40s, early '50s, he brought his people's revolution to China and tried to kill every missionary and pastor in the country. By the time he was done millions of Christians had died and the few that were remaining had to go underground. But did you know that today the nation that has more Christians in

it is mainline China? There are a hundred and fifty to two hundred million Christians there. Why? It's what's been said by wise people before, "The blood of the martyrs has been the seeds of the church." You kill one and 10 more will replace it. You can't stifle this message because Christianity is designed to thrive as it suffers. That's why you are called to suffer. God intends something more than just your suffering—He's working something for your good and His glory.

The church survives the worst hell can spew out of its vile mouth. The floods of evil that would overtake God's people like a tsunami have not washed her from the earth but only carried to other parts of the world with the Gospel. Christianity always survives when it suffers. But do you know what our problem is? I want to speak to Christians. Our problem is we don't want to suffer. Who does? It's not rational nor reasonable, is it? Here we are standing opposed to our own God by not submitting to His own ways.

We have difficulty submitting because we have difficulty believing the next principle of God's wisdom:

4. Holiness is the greatest success.

This is the wisdom of God. Once again the natural man can't understand this. *You're telling me to stop all the things that I'm doing and follow your Jesus and start going to church and reading my Bible. That's true success?* I didn't say all of that. That's what religion says. Religion is nothing more than another manifestation of man's wisdom. It's not God's wisdom. I'm suggesting to you that the Gospel says come to know Christ. Not about Him. Know Him. Know Him as you would a wife or a husband or a dear, dear friend. Come into a relationship with Him. Put your trust in Him. Follow Him and He will lead you into paths of righteousness. He will lead you into places and experiences in Him that, once again, are unspeakable. They're past knowing, they defy description. Holiness is the greatest success there is.

The world says if you want to be happy then pursue happiness, go for it with all of your might. Grab it. Seize the opportunity. Do it now because there may not be another opportunity like the present. Do what you can. Achieve it. Work. Strive. Get up earlier. Go to bed later.

God says no. Anybody who seeks happiness is a fool. God's way is to seek holiness and you will be happy. Be holy and you will be happy. You will be the most content person there is.

The world can't understand a young woman who lost her husband to cancer when she wrote:

One thing that I've become convinced of is that God has different definitions for words than I do. For example, He does work all things for my eternal good and His eternal glory. But his definition of good is different than mine. My "good" would never include cancer and young widowhood. My "good" would include healing and dying together in our sleep when we are in our nineties. But cancer was good because of what God did that He couldn't do any other way. Cancer was, in fact, necessary to make Bob and me look more like Jesus. So in love, God allowed what was best for us ... in light of eternity.

The unsaved person hearing that says that just doesn't make sense. It's foolishness.

But the greatest display of God's wisdom that creates the greatest angst in the heart of a natural man is,

5. Salvation is not by man's effort but by power of God.

It is this fact of God's wisdom that creates the greatest difficulty for the lost person.

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

What you think is foolish today, my friend, is the power of God to change you. The very thing you curse and mock is the very thing that can set your soul at liberty. It can deliver you from your life-style and behavior because it goes to the root, not to the behavior but to the heart. You can't do that. You are in a prison by virtue of your birth. By being born you are entrapped within a prison of desire that are contrary to righteousness and holiness. You can't set yourself free, there is no key, there is no breaking yourself loose. No effort of religion or goodness or behavioral changes will set you free. It's by the power of God alone.

May God help me to make this clear today. For years I labored preaching the Gospel myself and yet, if I had died any of that time, I would have split hell wide open. While pastoring our second church and preparing for a message reading Romans 6:6, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Christ that the body of sin might be destroyed, that he should be free from sin for

he that is dead is free from sin,” and the Spirit of God spoke to my heart and said that had never happened to me. It hadn’t. It wasn’t until six or seven months later while on my knees on an old wooden floor where Karen and I were renting that God showed up that morning and did what I cannot explain. All I can say is that it was the power of God. For 26 years by self-effort, religious effort, good behavior, and trying to impress man and God, I finally ended up on the bottom of the heap on my knees, confronted by a holy God, a God I could not overcome or overpower. Not all my tears or crying or prayers but God came that day and He changed me. It’s the power of God through the death of Jesus Christ.

A man’s heart is not changed by the empirical evidence of the scientist or the sharp blade of the warrior. No, none of these things can transform the sinful soul who is as dead in the spirit as Lazarus was rotten in the grave before the Lord awakened him. That’s your problem and that was mine. You’re rotten. Dead. Putrefied. There is no strength to change your life so that it would be acceptable to God.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

It’s the power of God. That’s what we need. Human power is always going to produce the same. That’s God’s wisdom—like after like, kind after kind. You can’t override that rule. All that dead men can spiritually produce is deadness. Even your religion is dead and it will damn the soul for all eternity. My friend, you need a miracle. You need a supernatural God to step into the deadness of your heart and bring the life of the resurrected Savior. He does that, but He does it by His own power and His own way so that the Bible says in Romans 9:16,

“So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.”

Do you know what that means? It means you don’t get saved because you want to, you don’t get saved because you wept and cried and prayed for God to save you. No, the Bible says those who are saved “were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). Only God shows mercy and only God has this kind of power that can transform our lives and change us at the very core of our being and set us free to understand what God meant for us. Only God can do this. And because only God shows mercy we therefore pray and weep and seek His face and ask Him to save us, knowing that if you do that He will. He is plenteous in mercy, even to us here today. “His mercy endures to every generation.”

If you're still alive, you have the hope that God will be merciful to you if you will humble yourself and simply recognize that you can no longer do what's necessary to change you. No, you need a power that is greater, from heaven not of earth, the power of God Almighty. Throw your religion aside, toss it overboard, because it will sink you and your ship. Trust in the anchor of Jesus Christ who has entered beyond the veil and there He is for us.

Many do not understand this fact within the professing church and they too despise the wisdom of God. They're faithful in attendance, faithful in their duties and obligations in the church and when they die they perish because they've never understood that true authentic Christianity is God rescuing sinners who do not deserve it.

You see, Christianity is the only religion of the world that's not based upon meritorious effort (you earn your way into acceptance). Islam is not that way, Buddhism is not that way, Hinduism is not that way, Confucianism is not that way. No other religion in the world says there is no hope for you, that you're dead, undone, doomed, and your epitaph has already been written by God: "Rebel, under the wrath of God." Only authentic Christianity says there is one who died in your place, suffered for you in obscurity and shame and reproach like no one else, bearing your sins and the awful judgment of God and was raised three days later. Only Christianity boasts in a resurrected Savior and that His power to transform you is able and enough. Will you believe Him?

It's not just the world outside of the church that calls authentic Christianity foolish. It's also many professing within the church. There are many, I pray not here, but I must say before I conclude that there are some who believe in a form of godliness but deny the power thereof. On the outside you've learned the right things to say, you've learned the behavior, the mannerisms, the duties, the obligations of the church and you've learned it well. You know how to do it but there's no life. The power of God is missing. How do I know that? Because when you leave this place no one really knows that you're a follower of Christ. Remember, I began with the premise that authentic Christianity is always going to be recognizable because it stands so different to its environment. We leave here and there's no burden for the lost soul, we are fearful and so like Peter we deny Him publically. We would rather compromise so that we might gain the approval and acceptance of peers and family members instead of standing with Jesus Christ.

Authentic Christianity will never bend or bow or compromise. It can't and it will not. Therefore if you are compromising, if you are remaining silent, if there is nothing different about your life

except you go to church on Sunday, my dear friend, you do not have authentic Christianity, you have a world-made kind of gospel that in the end is cursed by God. Anathema.

Are you His? You say, "Yes, but like Peter I deny Him. I sometimes do that." I'm not talking about you denying Him once now and again, I'm talking about everything you stand for in the heart of your hearts. Authentic Christianity humbles itself and it picks up the cross and it goes where God sends it because it knows God will be with him or her. The idea of going and not having God with them is worse than whatever suffering they may have to endure. That's authentic Christianity. There is where the blessing of God rests. It rests on the men and women who will go in the name of Christ because God is living in and through them and they would rather go and endure whatever heartache, whatever pain, whatever brokenness, than to go without the presence of God. Authentic Christianity dwells in the presence of God, in His light and the only thing it lives for is His blessed smile upon them. That's authentic Christianity.

I pray God works in us this work of Jesus Christ until the day of His appearing, that you will be made not to bend or bow or compromise because if you have authentic Christianity you cannot and you will not. Amen.