

Fake and Real Spirituality

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[0:00] Let's take our Bibles and turn to Colossians chapter 2. It is our privilege to have the Holy Spirit, the living author of this word, to read with us the Holy Scriptures, and even in the reading and preaching of it, to have its meaning set before us, and to be taught, and to show us Christ in the Scriptures.

I'm going to read Colossians 2, 13 through 23. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ.

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us. He took it away, nailing it to the cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.

[1:27] Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

These are all destined to perish with use because they're based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations, indeed, have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body.

But they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. We do, indeed, depend totally on the Holy Spirit for what we are about to do.

John Calvin had a pulpit that was pretty up high, and he had some stairs that he had to go up to to get up there to preach, and as he went, he prayed, Come, Holy Spirit, come.

[2:47] And I've taken to that for some time now, and so when I walk up these stairs, I'm always preaching or praying, Come, Holy Spirit, come. So sometimes it looks like I'm just standing there.

It's probably because I'm really thinking, Holy Spirit, I need you, please. Well, we do depend on him. This evening, we're going to talk about intimidating, but fake spirituality.

It's intimidating, it's imposing, it's daunting, but it's really just fake. It's empty. It looks amazing, but it's not the real thing.

The Pharisees were experts at this fake, intimidating spirituality. They had a kind of, they kind of had, they had a religion and a spirituality that was imposing and impressive.

The saying was, if only two people ever get to heaven, one will be a Pharisee. They fasted twice a week, they tied the spices out of their window garden, and every rule was guarded and kept, and every detail was thought out.

[3:59] I read this one yesterday. You were allowed to eat radishes on the Sabbath, but you were warned against dipping them into salt water because you might leave them in the salt water too long and pickle them, and pickling is work, and work is not allowed on the Sabbath day.

It's Sabbath breaking, and you can go and read the Talmud and what it says about that, and that sounds utterly ridiculous to us, but that kind of awe-inspiring holiness was definitely impressive to the people around them, to the masses, and that for them was spirituality at its highest.

If your religion gets down to your radishes, you've really made it, or so they thought, and that was something to sit up and pay attention to. Whoa, that is something.

It takes someone special to live that way, and the Pharisees loved it, and of course, Jesus had an entirely different opinion of the Pharisees and their spirituality.

He said, woe to. He said, woe to you, you hypocrites. Your spirituality, for as impressive as it is, it's all on the outside. You're filthy on the inside, and so the question this evening that I have for you to consider is, are you caught up in that kind of spirituality, this kind of fake, yet intimidating spirituality?

[5:33] And I'm not talking about just propagating it yourself, not just being a Pharisee, but on the other side of the equation, being one of those persons who looks at spirituality and says, wow, those people are impressive.

Are you wowed by others? Are you overawed by others? Do you live in your minds under the judgment of others? And you think, well, they think, I'm a failure.

I'm inadequate, disqualified. Like, you just don't measure up. Well, Paul has a word for you. And if you yourself are living in this kind of fake, intimidating spirituality that puts people into little boxes, of condemnation, then Paul has a word for you.

Well, you know your own mind. You know where you're at. And so, let's look at this fake, intimidating spirituality and then contrast it with the real thing.

And that's what you see in Colossians 2, verses 18 and 19. Now, in verse 18, he begins with instruction, with imperative, something to do based on all that fullness that we have in Christ.

[6:45] And we've talked again and again about all that fullness. Paul says, don't let anyone judge you. So don't let their judgment come into you and their condemnation come into you.

And now he says in verse 18, now, don't let anyone disqualify you for the prize. And the idea is, is I think the very same as the one before, or at least very similar.

The idea is, don't let anyone say you're a failure, you're inadequate, you aren't measuring up because your spirituality isn't this great, impressive, awe-inspiring thing.

Paul wants to say, you have Jesus Christ and that is enough. And so, what's this fake, intimidating spirituality and why shouldn't we let those who hold on to it disqualify us, who say, well, you really don't have what it takes.

You're not really up to snuff. Well, first thing we notice about this fake spirituality is that it is oriented toward me, not Christ.

[7:53] Christ. It's oriented toward me, not Christ. So, there are actual Pharisees floating around, but I think to one degree or another, we are all recovering Pharisees because that's the native language, that's the native philosophy of the flesh, which says, it's really up to me and what I do.

If I'm going to be saved, it's because I'm going to do something in order to save myself. I'm going to have to earn it. And so, it's about what I do or I don't do.

It's about my performance, my attitude, my thoughts, my feelings, my doings. It is inwardly directed and inwardly oriented. And fake spirituality doesn't rise any higher than that.

It's just a spiritual version of it. It just takes me deeper into myself. And so, you can see, look at these things, the things that these hyper-spiritual, intimidating people are concerned with.

It says, they delight, in verse 18, they delight in humility. The NIV says, false humility. They delight in doing things that make themselves look humble.

[9:11] It was about how they looked and how it made them come off. They delighted in what they saw. So, they had visions and the like. Great, fantastic, ecstatic, spiritual experiences that they themselves had.

And when they took the temperature of their spirituality, they didn't look to Jesus Christ. They looked at what they were doing to serve. And then they looked at what they had seen and what they had experienced and what their worship was like and what they had participated in.

And so, what is the focus of this fake, intimidating spirituality? It's them. It's always, look at me and what I'm doing, what I've seen, what I've experienced.

And that's what these people were about. Now, how does this kind of thing and thinking work itself out among us? How does this mentality show itself?

How are we tempted to walk with these kinds of people and fall into the same kind of thinking? And we don't want to talk about washing cups and dishes and being careful of our radishes because that's not where we're at.

[10:25] And we don't even want to talk about visions or speaking in tongues, although that would certainly, we could certainly go there because that's not where you are at. It's not where we as a

church are at.

But you can see it, this inward focused spirituality, we can see it in more subtle ways. One way that I see it in myself and in others is that we think primarily of our spirituality as a battle between me and my sin.

Now, is the Christian life a battle against sin? Yes. And if there is no battle, then the question that I would have is do you have any spiritual life at all? If the spirit of Jesus Christ is in you, there is going to be this opposition and this battle against sin.

But the subtle danger and even in that is that we think primarily of our spirituality as this battle between me and my sin. It's still primarily about me and what I've done or I'm doing or not doing, my successes and my failures in this battle.

and so I've seen it repeatedly, people struggling with some sin and they measure their entire spirituality by this battle and they see their entire spirituality as focused on this one particular battle and they have very little success much of the time and the reason is, and the reason they go right on in the same slavery is because they're still primarily thinking of, from the, they're operating primarily in the flesh in the context of me and what I have to do and what is working and what is not working and they often pray, God, why don't you do this for me?

[12:18] I'm doing this and that for you and I thought I was doing the right thing and you're not giving it to me and there's very much the same mentality of, of I do this and God, you owe me that.

This primary, this, this thinking of, of me is overshadowing and dominating their entire lives and so, Jesus hardly breaks in to their thinking.

The light of Jesus Christ and the goodness of the gospel, it hardly filters in through the cloud of this battle that's always over their head and so, this, for us, that's how often it is.

We, we measure our spirituality by that, just that battle. Well, true spirituality is not me focused.

Yes, there is a battle. Yes, I do have sin to deal with and I take it seriously but I always have one eye on Jesus Christ.

Hebrews says, keep your eye on him. It doesn't say keep your eye on your sin. Keep your eye on Jesus. It's Christ focused and you see that in verse 19.

[13:27] These people have lost connection with the head, with Jesus Christ. They're unhinged from Jesus Christ and so, they're doing their spirituality, they're doing their religion but it's not connected to Jesus Christ and so, they're fighting the battle and they're pursuing holiness and they're doing their good deeds but it's all without any reference to Jesus Christ.

So, they might have a historical faith, they might say they believe in Jesus Christ but the daily grind, Jesus isn't there.

Well, we read Philippians 3 last week and I preached on that and I would encourage you to go back and look at what Paul said but do you remember what Paul's goal was? He's saying, I want to know Christ.

I want to gain Christ. I want to take, he wasn't saying, I want to stop sinning in this area or I want to take up this new discipline, this new practice. No, his whole orientation is toward Jesus Christ.

I want to gain him, I want to know him. Now, does Paul want to kill sin? Does Paul want to discipline himself? Yes, there are passages that he tells us to do those things but that was not his first focus.

[14:48] That was not what had the first place in his heart, in his mind. It was Jesus Christ but I want you to, I want to be careful here. I'm not creating a false dichotomy, an either or, like it's either Jesus or I'm fighting against my sin.

I'm talking about priorities. Paul's heart had this compass that was pointed toward Christ to know him and it was in the context of I want to know him, I want to gain him, I want to trust him more, that we actually do defeat sin.

We actually do put holiness on and I have seen that where the battle, when the battle gets shifted from just me and my sin to now me and Jesus Christ and my sin is still there and I'm still dealing with it but my focus is on Jesus Christ, I've seen the power of sin fall away and the power of Jesus Christ.

So that's true spirituality. It's living connected to him, living out of him, living by faith in him, thinking mostly and first about him. Now intimidating, so intimidating, fake spirituality, it focuses on me and primarily on me and what I'm doing.

Real spirituality focuses on Jesus Christ. Second, fake intimidating spirituality measures by external appearances. It measures by external appearances.

[16 : 20] Not Christ. Fake spirituality is impressed by external and especially high things, whatever those high, grand, glorious things are.

They delight in false humility, they delight in the visible expressions of humility, but they really don't know anything about real humility. humility. So their humility is this redwood tree that you can't miss.

Everyone sees it and they're careful to prune it and to keep it nice and tall and beautiful. Real humility is a flower that you can step on and no one will hardly even notice. So after the fellowship luncheon, they're putting away chairs and they're thinking, I'm putting away chairs and I'm sweeping and they like that feeling of I'm doing something.

and hopefully these people are seeing me do it. And then it's not much of a step for them to look at other people who aren't doing it and think, well, I'm really spiritual, but they're just thinking about themselves.

Don't they care about what needs to be, what needs to happen? I'm a servant. So they delight in the appearance of humility and the acts of humility, but they delight in it because it shines a light on them so people could see it.

[17 : 39] It's really just a way for them to boast in themselves. And Paul says they're focused on the worship of angels. And I don't think what he's saying there is that they worship angels.

That doesn't seem to be happening. What he's saying is is that they're all about the great and fantastic worship of angels.

So they're into, they've seen how angels worship. They've had these visions and they've seen how angels worship and it's fantastic. And so human worship, regular worship, is beneath them in some ways.

They've participated with angels. They've seen things. And do you see, do you feel their spirit? Low things. Ordinary things.

Ordinary people singing in an ordinary way is something that doesn't impress them. They don't see any, anything special or anything glorious there. They're just caught up in appearances and they measure people by appearances and whether they're extraordinary or not.

[18 : 52] You've heard of the Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis. Screwtape is this master tempter. And he's writing to sort of a junior tempter named Wormwood and he's giving him directions on, this is how you best tempt someone.

This is how you handle your patient. And in the point of the story where I'm going to read from, this man, under Wormwood's care, has just become a Christian.

And so he's just started going to church. And, you know, Screwtape doesn't, he doesn't think all is lost. He said there's still some possibilities here.

Now, listen to what advice Screwtape gives to Wormwood. One of our greatest allies, so this is, I just want to be careful here, this is speaking from a demonic point of view, not a Christian point of view.

One of the great allies at present is the church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the church as we see her spread through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners.

[20 : 02] That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately, it is quite invisible to these humans. Now, all your patient sees is the half-finished, sham, gothic erection on the new building estate.

When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face, bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt text of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad and in very small print.

And when he gets to his pew and looks around him, he sees just that selection of his neighbors whom he hitherto had been avoiding. Now, it matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains.

You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the enemy's side, on God's side. No matter, your patient, thanks to our father below, is a fool, provided that any of those neighbors sing out of tune or have boots that squeak or double chins or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous.

At his present stage, you see, he has an idea of Christians in his mind, which he supposes to be spiritual, but which is, in fact, largely pictorial, largely false.

[21 : 36] So, ordinary Christians doing their best to sing, struggling with their weight, not wearing nice clothes, they figure are unspiritual.

They figure aren't really up to snuff. And when they go to a church building, they're impressed with the big, beautiful building. They're impressed with the singers on the stage, they're impressed with a man in a suit, or they're impressed with a man with blue jeans.

And they're impressed with a good pianist, or they're impressed with a good guy playing the guitar and the drums. See, they measure things by how many people there are, or how few people there are.

Sometimes it's by how many people there are, they like that, and sometimes they get in there and they think, well, it's just us ten, I'm really spiritual because I'm going to a ten person church. And sometimes it's, see, it doesn't really matter.

Pride is not a picky eater. Pride will feed on anything. Pride will feed on large groups, and pride will feed on small groups. Pride will boast in a suit, and pride will boast in blue jeans.

[22 : 45] Pride will measure by what's fashionable, and pride will measure by what's unfashionable. See, it doesn't matter as long as it's external and it's not Jesus Christ. And that's how fake, intimidating spirituality works.

So tell me what you do, tell me what you've seen, and let me tell you about what I've done and what I've seen. Well, how does true spirituality measure things?

It's by Jesus Christ, isn't it? By their faith and their dependence on Jesus Christ. That secret connection to the head.

So we don't judge by external appearances, and we don't assume we understand their heart until we speak to them. Do they wear jeans? Okay.

Are they connected to Jesus? Then they're my brothers in Christ. Are they boasting in Christ? Then I love them.

[23 : 48] Then I'm for them. Do they worship by the Spirit of God and boast in glory in Jesus Christ? Then they're brothers, and I love them. I was watching a YouTube clip of a pastor who I just heard of not too long ago, and he's an Episcopalian, an Episcopalian pastor, and his church, he's a very low Episcopalian, which means he's not into high church liturgy and fancy candles and all that business.

It's very low. His church is in this office building or somewhere, but he did have a black robe on, and he had a little black belt cinched around it, and he had a white frilly, fluffy collar, something that I wouldn't be caught dead in.

And he preached a beautiful sermon on Romans chapter 3. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus, and God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

He preached the gospel, and he applied it to those people who were suffering unemployment. How do you measure spirituality?

You measure it by the person's grasp and connection to Jesus Christ in the gospel. So how do you measure another person?

[25 : 18] That's how. And how, more importantly, how do you measure your own spirituality? Not by what church you go to or by what your pastor wears or by how you worship, but, or even by all that sort of thing that you do.

For Paul, the all-important question is, are you living in Jesus Christ? Are you glorying in Jesus Christ? Is tomorrow morning a day that you're going to go forward and think, I need to trust in Christ and I'm going to venture boldly in Jesus Christ and I'm not going to sin because of Jesus Christ and when I do sin, I'm going to come quickly and repent and put my trust in Jesus Christ?

Are you connected to him as the head? Well, fake intimidating spirituality measures by external appearances. True spirituality measures by Jesus Christ.

Third, fake intimidating spirituality cuts up the church. It divides the church. True spirituality holds it together. You see what Paul says there, his unspiritual mind, his fleshly mind, literally, his flesh controlled mind, which says it's all about you.

It's all about you. You've got this. You can do this. It puffs him up with idle notions. So it puffs him up like a balloon until he just totally disconnects from the rest of the body and from Jesus Christ and

from the head and from God.

[26:49] He's puffed up. His own sense of importance tells him that he's above these people and he doesn't need these people and he's over these people.

So let me ask you, does your spirituality move you toward people or does it make you move away from them?

Away from people or toward people? Does your spirituality make you get down with the lowly, with the weak? Is there something that attracts you to them?

That you would prefer to be with them than with the high? Where you feel at home with the lowly and the needy and the weak, then you really are spiritual.

For God is high above the heavens and yet he looks down, he dwells with the weak and the humble in heart. Or do you say, I don't want to be with those people because they drag me down.

[27:54] When I'm around them, I don't feel good and it's hard to be spiritual. There's nothing I can do for them. They're really helpless cases. That sounds a lot like what the Pharisee said to that man in John 9 who was born blind.

You remember they weren't happy with what he was saying and they finally just said, you were steeped in sin from birth and they kicked him out of the Sanhedrin, they kicked him out of the temple. So, you're a sinner.

Get out of here. I don't want anything to do with you. And you know what it says next? I love this verse. Jesus heard about it and went and found that man. Jesus had a very busy week and yet he helped this man see.

He disappeared and when he heard what happened to that man, he went round about and said, I've got to go find that guy. Jesus gravitated to the lowly, to the despised, to those the world said are hopeless.

Pharisees gravitate to their own kind, to the accomplished, to the good, to the strong. And so they cut up the church because that's not what the church is.

[29:09] We're not all strong. Paul writes to strong and to weak. And so they divide and they sit with their own, they talk with their own, and they listen to their own, and they help their own, and everyone else is either looked down on, ignored, or looked at suspiciously.

They disqualify those whom Jesus Christ have, has qualified. Finally, fake spirituality, intimidating spirituality, the kind that cuts people, that cuts the church and pushes people away and is so daunting, that kind of spirituality looks for growth from me and not Jesus Christ.

It looks for growth from me, not Christ. And this is what verse 19 is saying. Their ideas of sanctification are separate from Jesus Christ.

They can do it without believing and trusting. They can do it without prayer. So prayer is one of the last things they get to. It's like the chore they have to get to.

It's the least we can do is pray. Verse 19 says, he has a lost connection with the head from whom the whole body supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews grows as God causes it to grow.

[30:33] So where does spiritual growth come from? Verse 19 tells us. Does it come from me? Well, that's what fake spirituality says and that's what fake intimidating spirituality banks itself on.

It wants to be all by itself. And so that's the impetus, that's the motion, that's the movement of what, like the monks and they go out and they say, if I could just be alone, if I could just have three hours every day to just read and meditate and pray all by myself, and if I didn't have these people and these demands, then I could really be holy.

And it does seem that after a while, I think we're all born into thinking that and to our Christian life, we think that's the way it is, but then we find out that those pressures and those people and those, that work and all that thing, all that stuff that we are called to, that's so demanding, is actually what God uses to sanctify us.

But faith spirituality says it's me. But how does the body grow? How does the church grow? How does each part grow? Well, it says right here, from the head.

All the growth in your spirituality, all your growth in graces, all your growth in holiness, this year, 2015, will come from Jesus Christ, from the head.

[32:02] And it says here, from God. God causes it to grow. So it's not my power, my strength, my doing that causes growth within me. It's God working through Christ in all of us.

And that means that puts prayer on the top shelf. That puts prayer on the first of the list. That puts desperate, believing, zealous prayer as something that I have to do, that I need to do, that I want to do.

It's not the last place. It's not the take it or leave it category. It is the first place. Because if my growth comes from God through Jesus Christ, then I must pray.

And then it says that the spiritual growth will happen in concert with these people. With these people. These ordinary sinful, struggling people.

Real spirituality says, I need all of them. And all of them need me. So real spirituality gets alongside the weak, puts an arm around the shoulder and says, let me tell you about Jesus.

[33 : 16] Let me point you to Jesus. Let me tell you about this verse. Let me remind you of this promise. Let me remind you of what he has done. Let me remind you of what you need to be doing because of what Jesus has done.

So real spirituality is getting alongside people and doing that, of encouraging them. But also real spirituality is getting alongside them and saying, I can't do this.

I need you to speak into my life. I need you to speak the truth and love to me. I need you to encourage me. I need you to hold me accountable. See, fake spirituality doesn't dare reveal anything about the real struggles.

But real spirituality recognizes that the cross of Jesus Christ reveals more about my sinfulness than any AA meeting ever would.

The cross says that I am so sinful, my condition is so desperate that only the death of the Son of God could save me. See, fake spirituality boasts in external things and it's adequate.

[34 : 32] It does the job for those people, so they think. But real spirituality says it's all I need Jesus Christ. It boasts in Christ alone. It sees glory in the cross.

It sees glory in small things and weak things and it finds wisdom in what the world calls foolishness. And it revels in Jesus Christ and him crucified.

crucified. And since his focus is on Jesus Christ and him crucified, it doesn't intimidate people.

It doesn't intimidate others. It attracts and invites others. It brings people in. It creates a home, a place where weak sinners can find a home and can find rest and growth and encouragement.

And we start to say, I like being around those people because they understand me, they make me feel comfortable, I don't have to pretend, and it's so encouraging.

[35 : 41] Real spirituality draws the body together and causes it to turn into a greenhouse where things grow. So it doesn't intimidate others.

and last, it's not intimidated by others. It's not intimidated by others, by what they're doing. Because my focus is not on what they're doing, my focus is on Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And when I have two eyes on Jesus Christ, everyone else looks pretty unimpressive. And so I'm not intimidated by them. well, let's pray.

Our great God, we do want to acknowledge that our hearts are deceitful and we need your truth. We too often and too easily lean on our own understanding and count ourselves righteous when really we are not.

Will you help us to see ourselves as you see us? But will you help us to look at Jesus Christ in the middle of all that so that we don't despair but that we put away our selfish way of thinking, our intimidating way of thinking, but that together, together as a body, we would lean more heavily upon Jesus Christ and glory in him more and more.

[37 : 21] That we say no to ourselves and no to our flesh and no to our pride and to kill those things as disgusting, hateful, unfitting things that they are and by faith to lay all of ourselves on Jesus Christ.

And so, Lord Jesus, please, as you have done for 30 years now, go on being our Lord, helping us to grow, helping us to love each other, help us to have a renewed vision of you and focus upon you, that our lives might overflow with fruitfulness, that the fruit of faith and the fruit of joy would abound more and more in our lives, that we would become more and more obedient, and more and more humble, and more and more dependent upon Jesus Christ.

He is our only hope. He is all of our boast. It's in his name I pray. Amen.