

“Fake Christianity: Churchism”

Colossians 2:6-8 (CEB)

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It happened in the first 2 months of our new church appointment. (by the way not here at PHUMC) We were having a potluck in the Fellowship Hall. A great spread of food. After we were seating and I was getting ready to have a blessing on the meal, I saw a woman approaching me getting closer and closer to the microphone. Even though I had been there just 2 months I already knew her name, knew her disposition and had been forewarned by staff that she was...well, let me say a church busybody. She kept getting closer and closer to me and the microphone stand. I stepped away from the microphone, called her by name and she said she needed to say something. Being new, I turned the microphone over to her. BIG MISTAKE! She leaned into the microphone and with a loud voice yelled, “Who brought these!!! (and she held up a large pair of Salad tongs and Salad spoon). She said, “You know at church potlucks *we* provide the serving spoons. Who brought these?”

Wow---now I’m getting uncomfortable and embarrassed. Everyone just kind of looked at her. I finally saw this hand go up, and a meek voice say, “I’m sorry, they’re mine.” Uh, that would have been the voice of my wife, Sarah Baldrige. When the rest of those in the Fellowship Hall realized it was the new pastor’s wife there was kind of a collective gasp. I think at that point I just went to prayer and blessed the food.

Now the story is not over. Many people went up to Sarah and not only apologized to her, but also told her “Welcome---you’ve been yelled at by this lady, like we all have and now you’re really one of us. Welcome to our church!”

Wow. Sarah and I laughed about it, but we were also mortified that what if that had been a first-time guest that would have been treated that way. By the way, through the years I had to have several conversations with this lady telling her to “Back Down.”

Beloved she was caught up in the rules. She was caught up in this is the way we are supposed to do it---and you are not doing it right. Really, over salad tongs.

Oh, but friends we cannot let legalistic ways run people away from church. Today we begin a series Fake Christianity. Today the topic is Churchism.

Now let me say I love the church, I love *this* church. A definition of churchism is a strong adherence to church rules. Now let me also say that rules are important. But as it relates to Fake Christianity let me say that non-Christians and new believers that come into church are not wanting and needing “Church rules.” (notice I didn’t say God’s rules) They are wanting and needed relationships, primarily a relationship with Jesus.

God has placed a tremendous responsibility on the church, but we need to make sure we make the distinction between petty issues and Kingdom issues. I believe that Churchism becomes a loyalty to the church over a commitment to Jesus.

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Let me explain. Even though we have a Membership Orientation tonight that I would love for you to come...part of the reason we have Membership Orientation is the next step in the spiritual formation can be the public committed to God through the membership vows. We are not out to get members to say---look at how many members we have. The Kingdom of God does not advance simply because your name is on a church role.

I believe the world sees Fake Christianity when they see more people committed to a building or institution instead of Jesus. It's not a checklist. Been to church today, check; put money in the offering plate; check, made sure I said hi to the pastor so he would know I was there, check. Now again I'm not downplaying church but I do want to say church is more than just preservation of tradition. More than just "we've always done it that way." Churchism is concerned with the institutional church as opposed to making sure we are surrounding ourselves and dealing with Kingdom issues. Yes, through the years I have spent hours listening to Trustees discussing if they should get a certain size bolt or would a counter turn bolt be better. Really. Get a bolt. Move on. We have people that we need to bring to Jesus. Let's not let our loyalty to 'church' get in the way of ministering to not only the people currently here, but also the next generation.

Colossians 2: ⁷Be rooted and built up in him, be established in faith, and overflow with thanksgiving just as you were taught.

Our faith is in Jesus Christ not in a church. Last year our Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church closed 12 churches due to lack of vitality. Also, sad to report that in 2017 in the Florida Annual Conference there were 296 churches that reported 0 new professions of faith in Christ. Lord, literally help us!!!

Let's not play churchism...let's be rooted and built up in Jesus and established in the faith and overflow with thanksgiving. Seek first the kingdom of God, not the church.

⁸See to it that nobody enslaves you with philosophy and foolish deception, which conform to human traditions and the way the world thinks and acts rather than Christ.

Ruled by Christ not by human traditions. Let's be rooted in Jesus and not stuck in church religiosity. I shared in the Direct From Dave email that was sent out on Thursday of 2 other illustrations where the church seemed to care more about tradition than being open to doing things differently to potentially reach all generations for Jesus. If you are not getting the weekly email and would like to you can fill out a Connect Card.... PLEASE PRINT...with your information and email, turn it into the Welcome Center in the lobby and we will put you on the email list for that.

Billy Sunday died in 1935. He was a former professional baseball player having played for the Chicago White Stockings (as they were known back then) and he ended his career with the Philadelphia Phillies. He left baseball and became a preacher with a very basic way of saying things. He was one of the most famous preacher of the first 2 decades of the 20th century.

One of his sayings was this: **(Image)** “Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going to a garage makes you an automobile.”

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Let’s not play church and churchism.

Now I was familiar with that saying from Billy Sunday, but in sermon preparation I found a couple more of his saying that I just have to share. **(image)** “Hypocrites in the church? Yes, and in the lodge and at home. Don’t hunt through the church for a hypocrite. Go home and look in the mirror. Hypocrites? Yes. See that you make the number one less.”

Friends the church is not a building. The church is the people. Yes, we are people of the church and yet we are the ones that can give people a bad perception of the church. You are not a Christian just on Sunday morning. Churchism is when people know that you are devoted to a church...yet you don’t live for Jesus. Somebody say, “Ouch.”

Let me talk about sin. Are you for it or against it? Xxxxxx Again I love this quote from Billy Sunday. "I'm against sin," he once said. "I'll kick it as long as I have a foot. I'll fight it as long as I have a fist. I'll butt it as long as I have a head. I'll bite it as long as I've got a tooth. And when I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till I go home to Glory and it goes home to perdition."

Wooo---let the church be the church. So how do we negate the churchisms and church self-preservation so that others do not see us as part of their perception of Fake Christianity. Culture needs us to be authentic, real, and genuine.

Here is what Jesus said: **Matthew 5:13-16 New Living Translation (NLT)**

¹³“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. ¹⁴“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Not people viewed as tied down by religiosity, rules and regulations. But we are salt. We are light. People of a church based on a relationship with Jesus.

We are called out. **1 Peter 2:9 New Living Translation (NLT) 9 ... you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.**

Oh, the goodness of God. We have the joy of sharing the goodness of God with others. We are called out of the darkness of sin into His wonderful light. Let’s not get bogged down in churchisoisty, religiosity, and churchism. We are called out to be followers of Jesus.

It’s football season and we now have many armchair quarterbacks. Those that simply sit and watch and complain. Well, “Get in the Game.” We are called out to live out.

1 Thessalonians 4:1 New Living Translation (NLT) 1...dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God....

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Live out a way that pleases God. Does it please God that you go to church? My answer would be yes. However, you are to be salt. You are to be light. You are called out to live out in your daily life in a way that pleases God. Are some coming to church simply to check off a box? Perhaps. But you need to live a Christian life beyond the campus of 1551 Belcher Road. Are there hypocrites at church? Yep. As Billy Sunday said, "See that you make that number one less."

We are not just called out to live out, but we have to do something about it. We are sent out.
Luke 9:2 New Living Translation (NLT) ² Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God...

He sent then to tell...who...EVERYONE...about the Church....no...the Kingdom of God. Not churchisms, but Kingdom of God issues. I think most pastors and staff spend way too much time on petty issues and not Kingdom issues. Help us.

To be sent means that you have to Go. There's an old hymn I sang growing up. We had a lady at church playing the piano that we said could really pound the keys. We would sing, "Standing on the Promises." That chorus says, "Standing, standing, Standing on the promises of God my Savior, Standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God."

But friends I'm afraid that rather than standing on the promises we are sitting on the premises. We are called out to live out to be sent out. And not just to be sent out, we are called to shout out.

Revelation 5:12 New International Version (NIV)¹² In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!

It says "loud voice they were saying," but my Baldrige Translation says "they were shouting out. "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Worthy is the Lamb!

Oh, not holding salad utensils in my hand shouting out, "Whose are these? Whose are these?" but rather shouting "Worthy, Worthy is the lamb. The lamb who was slain for us. In fact, in Revelation 5:11 it says there were many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand shouting out a seven-fold tribute to the Lamb of God. He has Power, Wealth, Wisdom, Strength, Honor, Glory, Praise. That is who Jesus is.

Oh, may the Lord find us faithful. May we stand in truth. Let us walk in love. We are salt. We are light. Called out to live out. Sent out to shout it out. Lord come and dwell among us!!!

