

“Fake Christianity: Practical Atheism”  
Titus 1:10-16 (CEB)  
September 30, 2018  
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Palm Harbor United Methodist Church, Palm Harbor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mcXtontujA> (Honest Preacher)

“You guys!! Don’t be bad!!! You’re supposed to be good! Stop it!”

Do we live what we believe? We conclude our series on Fake Christianity and “isms.” We talk today about Practical Atheism.

Back in 2010 I first became aware of this type of phraseology. Craig Groeschel, senior pastor of Life.Church which is based in Oklahoma, but actually has churches in 10 states. He wrote the book “The Christian Atheist.” The subtitle of the book is profound, it is this: “Believing in God but living as if He doesn’t exist.” Whoa.

We believe in God, we’re in church, but do go into the world and act as if He doesn’t exist?

Rev. Cathy and I were at a District wide clergy meeting on Tuesday. Some interesting information was shared. The national average of how many people attend church a given Sunday is...17%. That is the national average. In Florida only 15% of people attend church on a given Sunday. The presenter rounded the numbers up for sake of comparison. He said let’s say 20% attend church each week. Other statistics are: there are 40% who would go if invited. Let me repeat that. Statistics indicate that 40% of the people would come to church if invited!!! Now here is the scary thing. 40% say simply they are “done” with church. That breaks my heart. I wonder why they are done? Bad experience in church. Very possibly. Maybe even a bad experience or treatment by one who said they were a Christian.

Are we living as if God exists, or do we just do that on Sunday morning? Our scripture this morning puts it this way: **<sup>16</sup> They claim to know God, but they deny God by the things that they do. They are detestable, disobedient, and disqualified to do anything good.**

I people know that you claim to know God and yet you deny God by the things that you do...I would suggest that is perhaps Practical Atheism. People are disobedient and detestable, except on Sunday, and people see this the other 6 days and think... “I’m done. Why should I go to that church? Why should I follow who and what they believe?”

Groeschel puts it this way (**image**): How you live reflects the reality of what you believe? (great statement to jot down and reflect on it this week.)

What do you believe? Is it more than just an intellectual knowledge of the Bible. **James 2:19 Common English Bible (CEB) <sup>19</sup> It’s good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear.**

The demons believe in God. But they are anti-Christ. Is how we live anti (against) Christ?

So, going back to the statement that people are done with church. A common reason often heard is there are too many hypocrites in church.

There was an article in Relevant magazine entitled: “The Cure for Hypocrisy.” It was written by Tyler Edwards (May 20, 2015) Edwards is a pastor in South Carolina. He says this:

“So, what’s behind this perception that many Christians are hypocrites?

Here’s the hard truth: Often, we are perceived as hypocrites because, in some ways, we are hypocrites.

Maybe it’s because of what we say. We say lying is wrong, but we still lie sometimes. We say gossip is bad, but we still talk behind other people’s backs. We say God loves everybody, but we don’t always show love. We ask for forgiveness, but often fail to offer it. We preach grace, but often practice judgment. After all, churches are made up of people. And people are flawed.

Being a Christian doesn’t mean achieving perfection. It means we are all about Jesus. We are all for Jesus. It means we are invested in a relationship with Jesus. The only way to do that is to spend time with Him. We pursue Him first. We make Him our highest priority. It’s not a bumper sticker or a Facebook status. Being a Christian is about having a radical, life-altering relationship with our God and King.” Woo-hoo!!!!

It means we are all about Jesus. We need to be consistent and be sure we are a Christian 7 days a week, not just for an hour or 2 on Sunday!!!

Another Groeschel quote to write down: **(image)** “Many of us are informed about Jesus, but are yet to be transformed by Him.”

You know Jesus, but the demons do also. You know who Jesus is. You are informed about Him, but are you ready to be transformed by Him so you do not have daily practical atheism. He wants all of you, do you want all of Him?

There’s an old poem that I have edited that speaks to this. It is called “Three Dollars Worth of God,” by Wilbur Reese.

Three Dollars Worth of God  
 I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.  
 Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,  
 but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine.  
 I don’t want enough of God to make me love (a) *(original word: black man)*/(my wording---  
someone of a different race than me  
 or *(original words* pick beets with a migrant) work with someone with different views than me  
 I want ecstasy, not transformation.  
 I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.  
 I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.  
 I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.

In order not to practice Practical Atheism we must be transformed. Oh, but we are kind of like the toy Transformers that have been around since the 1980. There's the 6<sup>th</sup> Transformer movie coming out around Christmas. You know about Transformers **(image)**. They are Robots in Disguise. They look like a Car, but then transform into a hero. I think kind of the opposite happens with us. We come to church as the gigantic Transformer, Super Church Goers, Christian, and when we leave we transform back into our little car and live like there is not God---a Christian in disguise. Oh, claiming to know God, but denying God by the things that we do.

A comedian who died before I was even born had a great saying, **(image)** Fred Allen said this, "Most of us spend the first six days of each week sowing wild oats; then we go to church on Sunday and pray for a crop failure."

Here's what the Bible says, **1 John 2:3-4 Common English Bible (CEB)** <sup>3</sup> **This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commandments.** <sup>4</sup> **The one who claims, "I know him," while not keeping his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in this person.**

Oh, to not just be informed about Jesus but ready to be transformed by Him.

This is how we know that we know. This is how the world knows that we know...if we keep His commandments. 10 commandment a good place to start. By the way they are 10 commandments not 10 suggestions.

Jesus was asked, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:36-39)

This is how we know that we know Him. This is how the world knows that we know Him...do you live a life where it is evident that you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. Does the world see you loving others? Yes, a vision of Loving God and loving all.

Practical atheism says I'll go to church, put in my time but will live like I want to when I leave. Practical atheism says I'll say I'll believe in prayer and I'll even pray in church, but that's just a Sunday thing. Practical atheism says on Sunday I am dependent on God, but during the week I'm independent. Practical atheism says I know God wants me to forgive, but that's just part of what is said in church. Practical atheism says I will live like I want to, I want have the priorities I want, and oh, I'll be sure to give God a little credit along the way.

What has happened to living a life pleasing to God. Our scripture read this morning said people claim to know God, but they deny God by the things they do. No, we are not perfect. Yes, we will fail. Yes, we will fall. Yes, we will slip up. Yes, we are going to sin. No, we do not have all the answers. Practical Christianity says I want to be honest and let people know that I have struggles too. I'm trying to live like Christ wants me to live, but it is tough. I can't find a scripture and verse that says being a Christ follower is easier.

Craig Groeschel says this: **(image)** We want God to prove Himself so we can trust Him. God wants us to trust Him so He can prove Himself.

Wowzers. We want God to prove Himself so we can trust Him. God wants us to trust Him so He can prove Himself.

Guilty!!!! This very week Sarah and I experienced this. Something blew our spiritual socks off, and we were reminded once more time that God simply wants us to trust Him. When we trust Him, He proves Himself.

We walk by faith. Yet we want God to prove Himself so we can trust Him. No let's trust Him so He can prove Himself. And oh, we need to be reminded over and over again---trust Him. Trust Him.

A practical atheist believes in God but lives as if He doesn't exist.

How are you living? Are you living out your faith? Not a Fake Christianity but one that is real, authentic and transparent.

Let's focus on Jesus. Not churchism

Let's focus on Jesus. Not consumerism.

Let's focus on Jesus. Not meism.

Let's focus on Jesus and not live a practical atheism.

Let's not have Fake Christianity, but Real Christianity.

Real Christianity is more than talk.

Real Christianity is more than saying Christian platitudes and having Christian bumper stickers.

Real Christianity is more than just about church.

Real Christianity is living a daily life for Jesus.

Real Christianity is putting trust in Him.

Real Christianity is doing good in His name.

It is reaching out to the least to know that through Christ they have the most.

It is reaching out to the last to help them know that in God's eyes they are first.

It is reaching out to the lost to help them know through Jesus they can be found.

I close with a poem entitled, When I am a Christian, written by Carol Wimmer

When I say, "I am a Christian"

I'm not shouting, "I've been saved!"

I'm whispering, "I get lost sometimes"

That's why I chose this way"

When I say, "I am a Christian"  
I don't speak with human pride  
I'm confessing that I stumble –  
needing God to be my guide

When I say, "I am a Christian"  
I'm not trying to be strong  
I'm professing that I'm weak  
and pray for strength to carry on

When I say, "I am a Christian"  
I'm not bragging of success  
I'm admitting that I've failed  
and cannot ever pay the debt

When I say, "I am a Christian"  
I don't think I know it all  
I submit to my confusion  
asking humbly to be taught

When I say, "I am a Christian"  
I'm not claiming to be perfect  
My flaws are far too visible  
but God believes I'm worth it

When I say, "I am a Christian"  
I still feel the sting of pain  
I have my share of heartache  
which is why I seek God's name

When I say, "I am a Christian"  
I do not wish to judge  
I have no authority  
I only know I'm loved