

## Top Five Modern Corruptions of Christianity

### 1. Segregated Fellowships - -Background/Ice Breaker:

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said *"it is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o'clock on Sunday morning."* Do think this is still true? Why is this a "corruption of Christianity"? Is your university or high school lecture hall more integrated than your church sanctuary? Why is that the case? What makes that so "appalling"?
- Before we study out today's passage, it will be helpful to give some background on the biggest issue that threatened to split the church in the first century. It was the Jew vs. Gentile divide. Prior to Christ, only Jews were included in the covenant with God. In fact, here's a common saying among many first century Jews: "Gentiles were created only to fuel the fires of hell." Jews were careful to keep their distance from the "unclean" Gentiles.
- This sentiment led to rioting among the Jews whenever Jesus or one of His disciples suggested that God loves Gentiles, too. In Luke 4, Jesus commends a Gentile widow (the widow of Zarephath) and a Gentile general (Naaman the Syrian) during His teaching in a synagogue. As a result, "all the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. they got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff." (Luke 4:28-29) During a speech in which Paul addressed a Jewish audience, he remarked that God had said to him, "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles." Here's the response: "The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live.'" (Acts 22:21-22)
- Now let's look at the church in Ephesus, which was made up of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Keep their prejudices in mind as we read this passage.

**Read** Ephesians 2:11-18

#### **Textual Questions:**

##### **v. 11-13**

- What do you think the atmosphere was in this church, given the fact that one group was calling the other group "the uncircumcised."? The Gentiles were the outsiders now trying to join with Jewish Christians in this church. What challenges does this create?

##### **v. 14-16**

- What's the barrier?
- What are the hostilities that each group holds toward the other?
- What are the barriers that keep your church from becoming more integrated? How do those barriers compare to the ones faced in Ephesus? Is there any good excuse for barriers if Jesus has brought peace, reconciling both groups to God through the cross? How has the cross brought about unity in your church - - if you attend a church that has abolished ethnic barriers?
- What are the hostilities that create this barrier in your fellowship?

##### **v. 17-18**

- Jesus came to bring peace to factions or divisions. What have you done to integrate your fellowship? When was the last time you had a friend of a different color over to your house for Bible study? Do you have Christian parents - when was the last time your parents had friends of a different color over for Bible study? Has your pastor preached peace in this way? What initiatives has he taken to bring this integration about in your church? Did they work and why?

**Closing Charge:** If the apostle Paul can expect unity in the Ephesian church, then we have no excuses today. If you're part of a church that is NOT actively preaching this peace through the cross, then you have created a corrupted Christianity. Don't accept a corruption or compromise.

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### 2. The Prosperity Gospel - - Background/Ice Breaker:

- Be sure to come prepared for this Bible discussion with a large stuffed animal and a sewing needle that has an “eye.” OR - just do what Jesus did... He looked around for an object with the smallest hole (a sewing needle) and for the largest living thing in the vicinity (a camel). You can do the same. Ask if anyone has an object with a small opening in it, like a bracelet or earring or needle. Then pick a person in the group (it’s not a good idea to pick out someone who has a challenge with maintaining their weight - especially if they might be sensitive about it). Pass the small object around the group and ask for volunteers to fit the person all the way through the small opening. If no one volunteers, ask why. Why is it ridiculous? What if the reward were heaven or the consequence hell for this task?
- Remind everyone that Jesus said,
  - “It’s easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” (*In case some students suggest that the “eye of the needle” was the name of a gate in Jerusalem, remind them this interpretation did not arise until the 15th century. It is baseless, as no archaeological evidence can support this completely fictional gate.*) A few more quotes from Jesus:
    - "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
    - “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." What was Jesus’ attitude toward money?
- Now explain that this week’s discussion of the “Top Five Modern Corruptions of Christianity” will be on the **“Prosperity Gospel”** which - in a nutshell - promises that material prosperity, particularly financial prosperity and success in business and personal life, is to be expected as external evidence of God's favor. It’s also been called the “Health&Wealth doctrine” or the “Name and Claim It” doctrine.
- As leader of the Bible discussion, please do not mention names. But here are some of the more prominent proponents of the prosperity gospel: Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar, Benny Hinn, T.D. Jakes, Joyce Meyer, Joel Osteen, Robert Tilton.
- Let’s look at a passage that addresses this corruption very specifically...

**Read** 1st Timothy 6:3-11

#### **Textual Questions:**

- v. **3-5** What type of person corrupts the sound instruction of true doctrine (the text gives three examples - look for all of them)? What does arguing over words produce? How did these false teachers view the relationship between God and money? How does their view corrupt the “sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ”? If thinking that “godliness is a means to to financial gain”, then what does that say about the prosperity gospel?
- v. **6-8** What does it take for you to be content? If you only had food and clothing, could you be content with only that? Why or why not?
- v. **9-10** Do you “want to get rich”? Why or why not? How does the love of money produce “all kinds of evil” in your life?
- v. **11** When you flee from this type of life, what should you run toward? How can you run toward righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness today?

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### 3. Individualism vs. Community - - Background/Ice Breaker:

- This is the fourth in a series of Bible discussions on the topic *“Top Five Modern Corruptions of Christianity.”* Today’s topic: *“It’s Just About Me and Jesus: How Promoting Individualism Corrupts Community in Christianity.”*
- Share a few words on the promotion of individualism as a western ideal.
- Group activity/Ice Breaker: Challenge each member of the group to lower themselves to a seated position (without a chair) to the point where their legs are roughly at a right angle. See who can stay in that position the longest. Next... have everyone arrange themselves into a circle. No have turn so that the circle resembles a conga line. Ask each person to sit back onto the person’s knees behind them (take your time and arrange this carefully). Now see how long they can remain in the seated position. Share about the strength of the community compared to the individual.

**Read** Philippians 2:1-5

#### **Textual Questions:**

- v. 1 What are the four big reasons which should motivate the Philippian Church to pursue unity in the church? (A: “united with Christ”, “comfort from His love”, “fellowship with the Spirit”, “tenderness and compassion”) Is it possible to be united with Christ and not united to the body of Christ? Why or why not? Is it possible to have fellowship with the Spirit and not have fellowship with the church? Why or why not? Have you ever considered yourself to be in a real relationship with Christ but not actively involved with the community of Christ? Tell me more about that.
- v. 2 After reminding the church about the benefits of Christianity, what does Paul call the Philippian church to do? What does “like-minded” mean? What does a community of “like-minded” people look like? If everyone in the community has the same love, what does that community look like to an observer? Is the immediate purpose of your life in alignment with the purpose of your community or fellowship? Have you ever experienced a mismatch between your purpose and the purpose of your fellowship? Tell me more about that.
- v. 3-4 What is “selfish ambition”? What would be the effect of “selfish ambition” on the like-minded unity of the Philippian Church? Tell me about a time when your selfish ambition interfered with your ambition to promote the community of believers. What is “vain conceit” (also translated as “self glory” or “worthless glory”)? How does vain conceit undermine the one purpose and one love of community? Tell me about a time when personal glory distracted you from pursuing glory for the fellowship. What are some of your interests that don’t promote the interests of others in your fellowship? How does humility promote the interests of the community before personal interests? What are some ways you can better display humility as a member of your fellowship?
- v. 5 What is Jesus’ attitude toward ... self interest? ... selfish ambition? ...personal glory? ... toward individualism? How does Jesus model a community attitude for us? Would Jesus approve of seeking a relationship with Him without seeking the same relationship with the fellowship of His followers - why or why not? What do you need to better in Jesus in order to become less individualistic? What do you need to model in Jesus to better serve His church?

**Closing Charge/Question:** We have two choices... allow our glorious participation in community to destroy our individualism - - or allow our individualism to destroy our glorious participation in community. But without community, we have only a corrupted relationship with Jesus.

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**4. Easy Believism - - Background/Ice Breaker: Ice Breaker:** What is your favorite oxymoron? Here are a few examples, can you come up with any more... jumbo shrimp, black light, modern history, numb feeling, Microsoft Works, nothing much, rap music (careful on this one), non-working mother, ill health, etc. There's a reason for this exercise. Today we discuss the third in our series of the Top Five Modern Corruptions of Christianity. It's on "Easy Believism" also known as Faith without Deeds, Carnal Christianity, Bumper Sticker Christianity, Salvation without Lordship, or Dead Faith. No matter how you describe it, you end up with an oxymoron. Let's look at a passage that addresses this corruption.

- **Read the Passage (James 2:14-26)**
- **Textual Questions:**
  - (v. 14) James seems to be combating a corruption of Christianity that has popped up in the church... what does the error seem to be? What benefit is there to having faith without works? Can that kind of faith save you?
  - (v.15-16) James provides an illustration to explain the absurdity of claiming faith without works. What are the works of Christianity that evidence a faith that says "Jesus is Lord"?
  - (v. 17) Have you ever been fooled into accepting "dead faith" as the real thing? Tell me about that.
  - (v.18) James seems to say that faith and deeds are inseparable and give evidence for each other. What is the potential trouble that can occur by separating sincere faith from sincere deeds?
  - (v. 19) What's the difference between demonic faith and sincere Biblical faith?
  - (v. 20-24) Why is Abraham used as an example of a faithful man? Does it take faith to do what you already want to do? What are some deeds that you already want to do that Jesus commands (that is, it doesn't require faith to do it)? What are some deeds that require faith (that is, they are hard or frightening or counter intuitive or require self sacrifice)? What would "easy believism" look like for Abraham? Why is that faith "useless"? What does it mean to be justified? What deeds should accompany a person who is justified by faith?
  - (v. 25-26) What would "dead faith" look like for Rahab? Since faith without deeds is dead, what deeds need to become part of your life to show that you have true faith?
- **Concluding Questions and Charge:** According to the passage, who is and who is not a believer? Likewise, who is and who is not justified or saved? What's the easiest way to see if you have real faith? What's an objective way to see if faith is really being evidenced in your life? Don't let this corruption of Christianity ensnare you with its complacency. Wake up and take a deeper look at how your faith needs to come alive.

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### 5. Consumerism Christianity - - Background/Ice Breaker:

- Before introducing today's topic, ask each participant to pull out a piece of paper and "make a Christmas list of at least three items" (watch your wording here - it will be important for the exercise). After everyone has completed their list, ask for a few volunteers to read his or her list. Don't make any comments until after all volunteers have read. If everyone reads a "getting" list, remind that you simply asked them to make a Christmas list - each person was free to write out what they would like to get or what they would like to give. Ask: "What conditioned you to write out a list of what you would like to receive?" Remind them of Jesus' words in Acts 20:35 "It is more blessed to give than to receive."
- OR... sing the beginning of an advertising jingle and see who can finish it. Examples: "F-R-E-E that spells free..." "My bologna has a first name..." "Snap, crackle, pop..." get a long list for some fun for the group.
- What are some ways that advertisers have effectively promoted the ideas of consumerism?

### Read *2nd Corinthians 5:14-15* Textual Questions:

#### v. 14

- What does it mean to be compelled? Have you ever felt "compelled" to do something for school or work or a team? Tell me about that.
- According to this verse, what compels? Who is someone that you are convinced loves you (like your mom for example)? Does her/his love make it easier to do things for that person; why is that?
- What is meant to convince us of Christ's love for us? How does the cross communicate Christ's love for you?

#### v. 15

- According to this verse, Christ's death on the cross convinces us and compels us to do what?
- Think of day when you lived for self, what did it look like? For how long was that type of day fulfilling?
- Tell me about a day that you lived for Christ rather than for self, what happened?
- For you, what's the difference between "adding Christ to your life" and "no longer living for self but for Christ"?
- Why did you decide to come to this college? How much of that decision was based on self vs. based on Christ? If you were to apply to grad school, what would be the biggest factors to help you choose a school?
- If you suddenly were given a day off on Friday - and you were caught on school work ;), what would you do with that day?
- What are some signs for you that you are living for self rather than living for Christ in your everyday life?
- It's easy to do things for Christ that we already want to do (Perhaps ask for examples). And it's easier to do things for Christ that don't cost us much (time, money, reputation, energy - again ask for examples if time permits). So what's the biggest challenge for you when you consider the biblical charge to "no longer live for self but for Jesus"?

**Closing Charge:** The cross is meant to open our eyes to a life that goes beyond mere consumerism. Jesus offers us a life of significance - only if it is a life "no longer lived for self." If you are still trying to live for self and fit Jesus into that scheme, you have never fully understood the power of the cross. Make a point to study the bible with someone who is no longer living for self but for Christ. Otherwise, you are allowing our current consumer culture to corrupt the basic message of the cross.

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**Bonus: The Sinner's Prayer - - Ice Breaker:** Get four volunteers to play dentist and patients. Run through three patient appointments with the dentist. Patient ONE has a completely rotten molar that requires a full root canal in order to save the tooth. The dentist examines the tooth, recommends the root canal and performs the procedure to save the tooth. Patient TWO has already had a root canal which has left his or her mouth in good shape. The dentist examines the tooth and recommends that the patient flosses and brushes daily in order to maintain a healthy mouth. Patient THREE also has a completely rotten molar that requires a full root canal to save the tooth. The dentist examines the tooth BUT this time recommends the exact same solution that Patient TWO received – floss and brush daily to maintain a healthy mouth.

- Was there anything wrong with prescription of care for Patient ONE?
  - Was there anything wrong with the prescription of care for Patient TWO?
  - Was there anything wrong with the prescription of care for Patient THREE?
  - Why is it wrong for THREE if it was right for Patient TWO?
  - What's the danger to Patient THREE for following the prescription?
- Today, we're going to discuss a Bonus topic in our series on the Top Five Modern Corruptions to Christianity... ***“Inviting Jesus into your Heart ... is this a prayer for lost sinners?”*** (Read about the history of the Sinners Prayer to prepare)
  - Can anyone describe the “Sinner’s Prayer” or “Inviting Jesus into your Heart?”
  - Does anyone know what Bible passage is used to support the prescription for lost sinners to pray Jesus into their heart?

### **Read the Passage (Revelation 3:14-21)**

#### **Textual Questions:**

- (v. 14) To whom is this letter written? In the Bible, when does a person enter into the church? So who is in the church? [Answer: people who are already saved, who have already had their sins forgiven, who have already entered into Christ!!!] Going back to our dental illustration, have these people had a root canal or do they still a need a root canal? [Answer: they've already had a root canal! – but we'll see that they still need to stay diligent about their oral hygiene or else things can deteriorate]
- (v. 15-18) How would you describe this group of Christians? What are some of their problems? But are they still forgiven Christians? OK, now that we have the context, let's look at the prescription that Jesus gives them...
- (v. 19-20) What are they to do? Tell me about a time that you needed to repent after you became a Christian. Why do you think that Jesus uses the illustration of Him knocking at the door after telling the Christians to repent? Has anyone here ever been guided to use this verse as a model prayer to have Jesus enter your life for the *first time* – that is, to be saved? Tell me about that. What's wrong with the context? How does this relate to the dentist visits that we discussed? How is this dangerous? How is it a modern corruption of Christianity? Does anyone know just how modern it is (A: only formalized in 1950)? What should be the context for applying Scriptures about salvation? [Circumstances in which Scripture addresses the lost rather than the saved.] Why might this be the most dangerous corruption of all?