

## Are You are Cultural Christian

Let's turn our hearts to 2 Corinthians 13:5 (a foundational verse that we're going to be using in our new series). The theme is: "Cultural Versus Biblical Christianity". We want to ask you this question: "Are you a 'Cultural Christian?'" And if you are, we hope that this Word will bring conviction, and conversion and consecration of your heart and your mind as you follow Christ each day by faith.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your presence, your power and your person. We thank you for your promises that we stand upon. We thank you for the provisions that you provide through prayer. And we pray, O God, that you will meet every need according to your riches in glory by Christ Jesus. We cast our cares upon you because you care for us. That you're able to preserve and sustain us in the midst of our challenges. Whatever our challenges may be this morning, may the presence of Christ so overwhelm our hearts and minds that we will see those challenges from an eternal perspective. That we will rejoice in you in the midst of those circumstances, that this is your will for us in Christ Jesus, that we give thanks in everything. Bless your word as it goes forth and minister to the hearts and minds of your people. And conform us and transform us to the image of your son (Jesus Christ), that we may live in this world as salt and light, so that we may influence others for the Kingdom— instead of Facebook and Instagram and TikTok and all these other social mediums. Help us to be the medium that you will use to influence the world for the Kingdom of God. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Speak Lord, your people are listening. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

2 Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 5. When you find that, please stand, if you can, as a sign of reverence and honor for the Word of God.

## Are You are Cultural Christian

2 Corinthians 13:5 reads, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

You may be seated in the presence of the Lord.

It was in 313 AD that the emperor Constantine the 1st issued a decree— an edict they called the Edict of Milan— where he declared Christianity legal in the Roman Empire. Prior to that, Christianity was illegal and the Saints were persecuted for their faith in Christ. By the Middle Ages (13th through the 15th century), the Roman Catholic Church held more power than most secular kingdoms in Europe. Even once the 1800s hit and the United States of America continued to grow, Americans considered the country as a Christian nation. It became comfortable to be a Christian. That’s if you were white and not Black or Hispanic or Native American. It was comfortable to be a Christian. It was respected— even expected. People could freely call themselves during that period “Christian”, even if they never repented, prayed or went to church. Just because their family lineage and background was church related. “You know grandma went to that church.” “Granddad was a member of that church.” “My my uncle was a Deacon in that church.” And they connected through this familial line. But as cultural Christianity rose, guess what happened? Biblical Christianity suffered. From the 1800s to 2022, the lines between the two became blurred. What is the difference between *cultural* Christianity and *biblical* Christianity? Beloved, there is a difference. First of all, we want to look at these five ways that cultural Christianity is communicated in our society, infiltrated by ministers in the church and people fall prey to their false gospel.

The first one is: anyone can be a cultural Christian. Anyone can be a cultural Christian. Cultural Christianity self-identifies. It’s a religion based on human logic, feel good experiences and popular translations of the scriptures. The Bible is a collection of guidelines and myths and stories useful for the good life. Offensive verses in the Bible, they ignored. They see human self

## Are You are Cultural Christian

as strong and capable if we have confidence in self. So cultural Christianity provides this platform for self, for selfishness, for self-aggrandizement, for self-centeredness. It breeds narcissism. Its song is “Me, Myself and I”. But that is contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ. See, in the cultural Christian philosophy, anyone can be a cultural Christian. But not according to Jesus. Anyone cannot be a Christian. In Matthew 7:21 (The Sermon on the Mount), the Bible says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” That’s different from cultural Christianity. Jesus taught in Matthew 11 verse 27, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Oh, beloved, see in cultural Christianity there is no revelation of the Son, there is no revelation of truth. It is the Son who chooses to reveal himself to those he has chosen before the foundation of the world. Don’t get mad at Jesus. Don’t get mad at the Father and the Holy Spirit because they’re persons too. And they have the ability to choose. And you in your “pro-choice” society promote choosing what you want. Why can’t God choose whom he wants? I heard one lady say, “My choice, my body.” Why can’t God choose who He wants to be a part of His body? It's God's choice! Cultural Christians don’t give room for God to choose whom he chooses as his son and daughter. Because in cultural Christianity, everyone can be a Christian. That’s not true.

Matthew 15:8 says, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” Who are these people? Religious people, the Jewish people, the scribes, the Pharisees—whatever group you wanna come from, whatever you wanna call them. The Baptist, the United Methodist, Church of God in Christ, the Church of Christ. Whatever you want to call a religious setting. Beloved, Jesus said, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.” That’s cultural Christianity. We can speak *christianese*. We can speak “God speak” and not know God and it’s okay.

## Are You are Cultural Christian

James 1:22 says, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” Why? If you are just a hearer, you’re deceiving yourself. The cultural Christians are self-identified. You don’t necessarily have to apply the Word of God to his life. All he has to say is that, “I believe the Bible is the Word of God.” How many Christians say that and then refuse to live out the Word that they said was from God? It’s a cultural Christian. The renowned atheist, Richard Dawkins, wrote the *God Delusion* and he stated on several occasions, he identified himself as a Christian. He recognizes the benefits of Christianity, Christian morality, Christian celebrations, though he does not believe in a God. He wrote a book *God Delusion*. And he is outspoken against the Christian faith. But he self-identifies as a Christian. That’s madness! Cultural Christianity is the tendency to be shallow and not understanding of the holiness of God. Cultural Christians want God to be more of a gentle God, Father in heaven. A type who spoils them and lets them have their own way. Cultural Christianity senses a need for the transcendent; for God, but on their own terms. When they feel like it. It is wanting the God they have underlined in their Bibles without wanting the rest of him too. It is embracing God relative not God absolute. Jesus is Lord. If he’s not Lord of all, he’s not Lord at all. See, there is a God we want and there is a God who is, and beloved, they’re not the same. They are not the same.

Jesus concludes his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:22 and 23, and this is when Jesus says, “On that day”, (it’s the day of judgment), “many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?” God, we had the church overflowing with folk. We had a big budget. We had big programs. We were on YouTube, we were on Facebook, TV, we had global ministry. We did mighty works in your name. “And then I would declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of iniquity (KJV), you workers of lawlessness.”(ESV) They were antinomian. They were against the law of God and promoting the love of God with their mouth but denying the law of God with their life. Isn’t that true that we can promote the law of God with our mouth and deny it with our life. In the last days, many will recognized the power of Jesus name without embracing Jesus as Lord and lovingly obeying his words. Beloved, that’s cultural

## Are You are Cultural Christian

Christianity. Cultural Christianity is self-identified, but biblical Christianity is Christ identifying The Called.

See, it ain't about you self-identifying. There are men who are self-identifying as women and they're men. And then there are women self-identifying as men and they're women. Pretty soon we're gonna have people self-identifying as cats and dogs. There was one man who identified as a cat and he transformed his whole body to look like an animal 'cause he self-identified. That's how he feels. Beloved, that's foolishness! Biblical Christianity is Christ identifying The Called, not The Called saying "I am a Christian. I am of Christ." Biblical Christianity is nothing less than a commitment to serving the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior, the Son of God and surrendering oneself to his call of salvation, sanctification, and service. Jesus said it this way in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." Now, people don't like that. Those who don't want to give God his, shall we say "his First Amendment rights" to choose whom he will, choose whom he desires right. They don't like that verse. Because Jesus said you can't come to me unless the Father who sent me draws you. So what do you self-identify as? You gotta make sure that he's identifying you as his call.

Look at John 15:16. I want you to see this very clearly. Jesus is teaching, he's in the upper room with his disciples, he's headed towards the cross and he says to the disciples, "You did not choose me." Stop saying you "chose Jesus." You haven't chosen; Jesus has chosen you! Don't say you "made a choice for Jesus". Jesus made the choice for you. When you heard the gospel of your salvation, then you were awakened to that choice and you receive that choice by faith. God's choice of you. God drafted you into his family. The NBA draft is coming up. Those men who are coming into the NBA, they don't draft themselves. They're drafted by these NBA organizations, you know, Detroit, Chicago, the Pacers. They don't have the right to make a choice where they would go. It's up to those who are the GM of those organizations. But you don't have a right to choose God. God chooses you, you're dead in your sin. You're far away from God, you're on the outside of God's reality, you're in darkness.

## Are You are Cultural Christian

God calls you out of the darkness, into the marvelous light. Stop saying you “chose God.” God chose you! Because if you chose God, you can un-choose Him. You ever chose people to follow you on Facebook and then you unfollowed them? That’s what you can do. That’s why God doesn’t leave it up to the human being to make that kind of divine decision. It’s an eternal decision. You don’t have the mind to understand the choice in the first place. So he chooses you, and he places you into His body, and he seals you with the Holy Spirit and he lives on the inside of you to come form you into the image of his Son. You can’t do that. Cause if you could, you would have done it already. This is what Jesus said, “You did not choose me.” I’m at John 15:16 in the New Testament, the 4th gospel. “You did not choose me, but I chose you and I appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, (remain) so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

And then that great high priestly prayer in John 17. This is really the Lord’s Prayer, not Matthew 6. That’s a disciples’ prayer. But *this* is truly the Lord’s Prayer. In John 17— you ought to go home and just read it tonight. It’s a powerful prayer. But if you are a pro-choice person, you won’t like that prayer because God is making all the choices for your eternal destiny. This is what he says in verse 9 and 10 (I’ll just give you a little bit and then you go and watch the rest of the story), “I am praying for them.” (his disciples). “I’m not praying for the world.” Well hold up! Loving God, merciful God, gracious God is not praying for the world? Shouldn’t God pray for the world? No. He’s praying for those that are his in the world. He’s praying for those who he chose who responds to the gospel. “I’m not praying for the world, but to those whom you have given me. For they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine and I’m glorifying them. What a love story! He’s talking to the Father about those whom he has chosen and that he loves them, and they belong to the Father in the beginning and they also belong to him. Christ calls those whom he chooses from the foundation of the world. Before you were knit together in your mother’s womb, he chose you. Before your mother started feeling birth pains, he chose you. Before you made your first cry out of that birth canal, if you will, and came

## Are You are Cultural Christian

into this world, he chose you. He did all that before your existence. Oh what a choice! What a divine choice! What an eternal choice.

Go to Romans chapter 8, because I want to conclude it here. This particular point on biblical Christianity is Christ identifying the call. Cultural Christianity is self-identifying. This is Christ identifying. It's a big difference. Romans 8:29 through 30 is called the "Golden Chain of Salvation". It highlights the sovereignty of God. That means the choice of God to make his own decision about who he wants to be in his family. Isn't that amazing! We don't have a choice what family we coming to, but God does. God chooses whom he wants in his family. If it were left up to us, some of the folks in our family wouldn't be our family member, but we have no choice. So we just put up with them, right? We say, "They family. I gotta put up with them. They blood. Gotta put up with them." But below that, if you adopt someone, you make it a powerful choice 'cause they're not a part of your natural family, but they become like your natural family because of the choice you made. That's what the Father did through the Son. He adopted us into the family. So verses 29 and 30, beloved, it highlights the salvation, the sovereign choosing of God of people that he divinely chose before the world began. Before Genesis one, God created the heavens and earth. God said let there be before that. He chose you. He chose you. You're that special 'cause He chose you before you messed up. He chose you before you sin. He chose you before you fell short of the glory. He chose you before you had a bad track record. Oh, thank God he chose us before in his Son. He chose us. And when we hear the gospel, the spirit convicts our hearts and mind. Quickens our spirit. Makes us alive to God and we realize our home in God through Jesus Christ.

What he says in Romans 8:29 and 30, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined." Meaning that your destination was ordered beforehand. That's what that means. But he did it for this purpose: to conform you. To what? "...To the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first born among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified." It's almost as if he's saying it's already done. He didn't say they will be glorified. He

## Are You are Cultural Christian

said they're *also* glorified. I mean, you can take this to the bank, you can put this in your pipe and smoke it. It's a done deal. You are glorified because you've been called. You are called, you're justified, you're justified. And with that call, that divine golden chain is salvation. Glorification is already done. That's what he's saying in this text. Why? Because biblical Christianity is Christ identifying the call.

This is called the Effectual Call of God. When you hear it, you can be in a room packed with people and the gospel message goes and you're the only one that heard it. That's divine choice. You know what I'm saying? I mean, everybody comes down 'cause they're told to. But some people just say because he chose them. Everybody come down, take the preacher hand, "Do you believe Jesus died buried and rose again?" And you say yes, I do. Give me your hand. Give God your heart. Not roll up your sleeves and get busy. That's been our experience in church. Coming down at the call of the man, not the call of God. You know what I'm saying? The call of God touches here, transforms you in the inner person. There have been many people walk down here, unsaved went to the pool, unsaved came out unsaved and been in the church unsaved all their lives. Because they haven't been called. They have not been called. They're calling themselves. Self-identified believers— or should I say self-identified sinners. Because they have not called on Christ, they have not repented. They don't feel remorse. They're controlling, they're narcissistic. They think that materialism and popularity is the marks of a true Christian. They think that getting everything they want from God, their prosperity, their success, is the marks of a true Christian. "You should never be sick. Why are we praying for sick people? You should never be sick following God." That is a false Christian. That's a false doctrine. "You know you should never have a bad day. You're blessed and highly favored you're the head and not the tail." That's incorrect application of the word of God. Jesus said, "In the world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world." Bless the Lord. And so that's number one: Anyone can be a cultural Christian. Our response? Biblical Christianity is Christ identifying the call. Not self-identify.

## Are You are Cultural Christian

Secondly, cultural Christianity is convenience. It's convenience. It works with your schedule, it works with your lifestyle, it works with your mentality, it works with your propensities and your proclivities. Whatever it is, whatever you like to do, whatever turns you on— that kind of Christianity accommodates your sinfulness because cultural Christianity is convenient. In a so-called “Christian Nation” like America that generally adheres to Christian principles and ideals, treating people well, we strive for peace and justice, but it's convenient to claim to be a Christian in America. Why is that Preacher? Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. This is a term that was first introduced in 2005 in a book called *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* by sociologist Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton. The term is used to describe what they consider to be common beliefs among young people in the United States. You wanna hear them? Number one, a God exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on Earth. That's good. Okay. I can buy into that first premise. Secondly, God wants people to be good. This one you're losing me. God knows people are not good. That it's not his desire to make you good, to make you regenerate, to make you say that you may do good, *but* God wants people to be good, nice and fair to each other as taught in the Bible and by most world religions. Thirdly, the central goal of life is to be happy. “*Don't Worry, Be Happy.*” That's the central role of life and to feel good about yourself no matter how “nice-sty” you are. Nice and nasty. You are talking about yourself. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life. You don't need to be particularly involved in my life except when God is needed to resolve my problems. That's cultural Christianity. Fourth, good people go to heaven— now you lost me— when they die.

Jesus said this in Matthew 7... That sermon's powerful. I keep going back to the sermon about verse 13 to 14. Jesus said this, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to (not heaven) destruction.” Good people go to destruction and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and few find it. Jesus said in Luke 9:23... You wanna follow me? You wanna be my disciple? You

## Are You are Cultural Christian

self-identifying Christians. He says, “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself.” Next to impossible for our culture of self-centeredness to deny themselves. It’s all about the self. It’s all about you. It’s all about your best life. It’s all about you having Friday. You have Good Friday. Friday every day. It’s all about you being blessed. It’s all about you being successful. How in the world can a generation who focus on selfies deny themselves? It’s gonna be hard. Deny himself, take up the cross, that sacrifice. That word doesn’t exist in the lexicon of vocabulary of this generation. Deny yourself. Take up your calls and then follow me daily. I’ll just follow you on Sundays. Moralistic Therapeutic Deism involves a belief in a loving most hands off God who wants everyone to be nice and fair to each other and enjoy happiness. Isn’t that this generation? Especially that Generation Z. Isn’t that Generation X, the millennials? It’s that generation. This God only steps in to your life when asked to. You know, if I’m not asking, then don’t come. Only if needed. You know when you take medications, the doctor would put “as needed” on the prescription. When the pain comes, then you take it. But that’s how we treat God, like he’s a pain pill. Most people are categorized in this cultural Christian world as good. And they go to heaven based on their goodness. And sin doesn’t figure in at all into the picture. Instead of wanting to please God by doing what he says is right, they do what seems to be right. This was a generation after Joshua died. A generation grows up, did not know God or the works of God. And they did what was right in their own eyes. They had God on their terms. It’s reading the Bible with an agenda, if they read it at all. It’s the credo: plan and then pray. In many ways, a cultural Christian has merely added Jesus to his or her life. Another interest in already crowded schedule. Look at your calendar. How crowded is it? Is it so crowded that there’s no time for Jesus. They practice a kind of “spare tire Christianity”. You know, keeping Jesus in the trunk. Just in case. There’s suddenly a flat. That’s different than biblical Christianity.

Biblical Christianity calls us to a lifestyle of obedience. Oh, that’s different from Therapeutic Moralistic Deism. In Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, there’s no responsibilities to

## Are You are Cultural Christian

God, there's no obligations you owe to God, there is no commandments that you have to obey when it comes to God, because you have God on your terms. But biblical Christianity calls us to a lifestyle of obedience. We are obligated to God. There are responsibilities to God. There is a vertical relationship with God. It's just not all horizontal. It is just not all self centered. At the end of the day, beloved, obedience is nothing more than love in action. Obedience at the end of the day is love in action. Jesus said in John 14:15, "if you love me, you will keep my commandments." You see how obedience is motivated by love for God because of that vertical relationship. In John 14:15, Jesus emphasized that love is the motivation for obedience. So how do we love God with our actions?

Number one, Love God by knowing him. No, not what you heard about him, not what the preacher preached to you about him. But you come to know him. This is just not intellectual knowledge. This is experiential living. Where you're taking the truth of God and it applying it to your individual walk with him. Love God by knowing him. 1 John 4:8, "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." Remember, you also said we love God because he first loved us. Loving God starts by knowing God. And having a relationship with him. That Greek word for "know" in the New Testament is *ginóskó*, experiential knowledge. It means to come to know through personal experience. Therefore, knowing God is intellectual, it's mental, and it's emotional; it's an experience with God. We sing that song, "*Falling in Love with Jesus, falling in love with Jesus is the best thing I've ever done.*" It's an experience with him, right? It's real. And you can come to know God by hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on the word of God. The Bible is your mirror into — not *Alice in Wonderland*, but into the spiritual realm, into heaven itself. It's a mirror. It reflects the glory and the person and the power in the majesty of God. How much time do you spend in your Word? It is in the Bible where he reveals himself personally, his character, what he liked, what he doesn't like, what he says about himself, what he says about you. You can come to know him experientially by doing what? Spending time with him and obeying what he says. Because at the end of the day obedience is just love and action. If you love me, you'll keep my

## Are You are Cultural Christian

commandments. 1 John 2:3 says, “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.” Beloved, they’re not burdensome.

Secondly, we love God not only by knowing God, but by obeying God. Because obedience to God, the expression of love, that’s God’s love language. What is your love language? Is it affirmation, verbal affirmation? Is it gifts? Is it service? Is it touch? That’s my language. Touch. What is your love language? Well, let me tell you God’s love language, since you don’t know. God’s love language is that you obey. And when you obey God, you touch God. When you obey God, you serve God. You hear what I’m saying? When you obey God, you’re giving God a gift. All those languages are rolled up in that word, “love”. Love God by obeying him. Cause when you know him, you wanna obey. 1 John 5:3 says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” They’re not a drag, they won’t burden you, they won’t push you down. His commandments will build you up. His love will raise you up. His love will keep you up. The best way to demonstrate our love for God is by obeying him. The Bible repeatedly equates loving him with obeying his commandments. You can’t have love and no obedience, and you can’t have obedience without love. 1 John 2:5 says this, “but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.” It’s completed. “By this we may know that we are in him.” Christ is constantly identifying the call, affirming the believer, reminding us you’re special because of me. You’re special because you’re in me. You’re special because you know me. You’re special because you love me. Because I chose you. Obedience is God’s love language. I don’t know if we can obey God without loving him, but we certainly cannot love him without obeying him. Obedience proves our love for him. It also keeps us in that love. And that’s real love. I know one sister sang she was looking for a real love. Jesus is the one she should have been looking for, cause he’s a real love.

Jesus said in John 15:10 and back in the upper room discourse 13,14,15 and 16 of John’s gospel, he’s teaching his disciples before he heads to Gethsemane and then from Gethsemane, he’s betrayed and he heads to the cross. But he goes to the Kangaroo court,

## Are You are Cultural Christian

then from the Kangaroo court he's battered and bloodied and bleeding and tortured and spit upon, and then he's taken outside of the city of Jerusalem on Golgotha, the Hill of Skull, Calvary, where he is crucified for my sins. Because that's his expression of love for me. He knows I'm a sinner. The only way he can make me acceptable to him is through his blood, is through his sacrifice, in his resurrection. But he taught his disciples before that in John 15:10, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." Look at that kind of relationship.

But obedience must be done with the right attitude. Trying to teach this to my son and my daughter all the time, you know, have the right attitude when I tell you to do something. They don't get it. I said, "You oughta do it because you love me," not because I'm mad and upset and then you do it. Isn't that how it works parents? They don't do it right away. They don't do it cheerfully and joyfully with love. And you know what I realized being a parent now that I'm just like that with the Father. God gotta getting mad with me. I gotta tick God off, in a sense, for him to get my attention. He shouldn't have to go through that if I learn to love him the way he loves me. Obedience gotta be done with the right attitude, beloved. Cause the right attitude produces right affections and the right affections produce appropriate action at all times. We are not to obey God reluctantly, out of fear, out of legalism. Instead, we are to obey his commandments willingly, joyfully, and cheerfully. Eagerly seeking to please the One and delight in doing his will because he gave his life for me. He sacrificed his life for my liberty.

Thirdly, I need to love God by worshiping him. Jesus was in this battle with Lucifer, the fallen Angel, in the 4th chapter of Luke. He was in the wilderness 40 days, 40 nights, right? He became hungry the 40th day. Oh my goodness. I would have lost today two. He went 40 days and then he got hungry. I would have got hungry at 24 hour cycle and I would have lost that battle. Luke says that Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" Worship is love expressed. It is defined as the feelings of expression of reverence and adoration for a deity. Worship is not reserved for Sunday morning only. It should be present in our daily living. Worshipping God includes singing hymn songs and

## Are You are Cultural Christian

spiritual songs. That's true, but it's how we conduct ourselves and our relationships with one another. It's the truth we speak to one another in love. It's the work we do when we're at work. It's the life we live before those who do not know Christ, that's worship. Worship is how we are as students in the classroom. Worship is how we work in the workforce and the marketplace. It's how we respond to the unsaved world. It's how we treat the unsaved person, that's worship. It's about living and behaving ourselves in a holy and pleasing way to him. You don't have to like your boss to work for him with the right attitude, because you're working unto the Lord.

Jesus says in John 4 to that woman at the well of Sychar, a Samaritan woman. John 4:23-24. He told her, "But the hour is coming, and now is here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him." God has a wanted poster and it says "God in need of true worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth." He's seeking. He's searching for people like that. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. And most importantly, we're to worship God alone. Don't worship peoples gifts and talents and abilities please. Please, too much of that in the church. We've created ministers into celebrities, to idols. We worship them. We don't worship the God they supposed to be serving. And we don't understand that their position is one of servanthood. The Minister, regardless how articulate, how attractive, how tall he might be, how short he is— you're not to be caught up on the vessel. You gotta get caught up on the message. The vessel can't do nothing for you. I don't care what type of clothes they have on. Skinny jeans or suit, they can't do nothing for you. Only the message that they preach, if it's the message of Christ. We are to worship God alone and nothing else, and no one else in the world. He is to sit on the throne of our hearts and receive all our devotion and affection. As A. W. Tozer once said, "True worship is to be so personally and hopelessly in love with God that the ideal of a transfer of affection never even remotely exists." For those affections we have from God, we can transfer that over to our children, over to our spouse, over to our friends and turn them into gods (little g) and they'll die like you will. God said this is

## Are You are Cultural Christian

the greatest commandment, love the father God with all your heart, my soul and strength. This is the greatest commandment. Make him the center of your life.

And lastly, put God first. It's that simple, isn't it? A relationship with God is not difficult. A relationship with the people you're in relationship with is not difficult. We make it difficult. Because we have demands and obligations and expectations that get in the way of just accepting the person as they are and letting God change them as he will. But we want to play God. We want to be the Holy Spirit. We want to shape them and make them into our image. Let God take that prerogative to change people from the inside out. But you gotta put God first. Because God is not first in cultural Christianity. He's first in biblical Christianity. Jesus said it, that loving God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength is the greatest of the commandments. Colossians 1:18 says, "And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent." That he might be first and have first place in everything. Loving God is making him the priority of our living and the center of our existence. The greatest commandment is to love him completely. And we can do that by reserving the best of our emotions, feelings, thoughts, intellect, passion, will, abilities, and resources to him. That he will have first place in everything. He is to come first before anyone else in our lives. God— no matter what the cultural Christian says— God is not a genie who grant wishes when needed and spends the rest of his time happily in his lamp. Put the top back on him. I don't need him no more. He's happy. He is all present, all powerful, all knowing, transcendent God, who is intimately in the details of our lives. And he places demands upon his people. God is not okay with whatever as long as people get along. God condemned sin. In you and in me and in the society, it doesn't matter. He executes justice throughout the earth. God is more interested in a lifestyle of godliness than a lifestyle of success and materialism, void of godliness. Following Jesus will cost you. If it hasn't cost you anything, it's because you're not following him. It's going to cost you something, of course. Your pride, your power, your control, your attitude is gonna cost you. It's gonna make you die to something that's in the way of him being what he should be in your life. If it hasn't cost you

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anything, it's because you're a cultural Christian. You're not a true biblical Christian yet. And that something that it is going to cost you is your life. Your dreams, your hopes, your aspirations. It's gonna cost your life in exchange for his life. The God of biblical Christianity requires commitment, confession, fellowship, sacrifice, repentance and obedience out of love for him. Biblical Christianity does not allow the culture to influence us above the word of God.

Let's pray.

Father, take your words from your servant and speak them for the hearts of your people and transform them from the inside out as you do your work of conforming and transforming them into the image of your Son. Only you can do it. We lay ourselves before you. We consecrate ourselves, we set ourselves apart to be pleasing in your sight. Help us to be the kind of men and women you have saved us to be in this world. And help us to live in this world and not to be of this world, and to influence this culture for the glory of Christ. In his name we pray, Amen.