

# Exposing The Almost Christian

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John 2:23-25

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So I think it's safe to say that we live in one of the most confused times in modern history. Think about it. You're belittled if you don't trust the science, yet when it comes to basic biology, just do whatever you feel. So if I feel like I'm a man trapped in a woman's body, then I'm going to identify as a man. And every person must pretend along with me that I'm a man, even when the science says I'm not. Biology says I'm not. My actual chromosomes say I'm not. Reality says I'm not, but reality gets the middle finger so I can do what feels right to me. Right?

I can live in an alternate reality. I can live in a non-reality of my own creating and everybody else must live in that with me. Trust the science until the science says, I'm not what I feel like I am. Then to hell with the science, to hell with reality, to hell with God. Which really is the core of this whole thing, right? Rebellion against the one who created us so that we can be our own in God. So to hell with the science, reality in God, I'm going to do what I feel. And if you don't support me, your love is conditional. So I'm going to cut you off because you don't support me. And I'm going to cut you off until you do support me. So whose love is conditional in that moment?

And I don't love you for being you, but you aren't you anymore. See, the sadness of this whole thing is that when a person does this, they say that they're being their authentic self because authenticity is now about feelings. It's not about facts. Listen, this is nothing to do with experiencing liberation from an oppressive society. This is a psychological disorder that people need serious help with. It's not loving to call a psychological disorder healthy. It's patronizing. It's wicked. But it makes people feel good. And if I feel something is loving, then it's loving because that's how I feel. Even when it's evil. No, love is saying, "I love you. And it's time to repent of your rebellion." It's time to repent. Come back to reality, come back to truth. Feelings lie all the time. Come to Jesus. He will forgive you. He will accept you. And He will give you your true identity. It's oppressive abuse to say identity disassociated from reality is healthy.

And yet the same thing happens all the time in spiritual realities. People within the sound of my voice are telling themselves that they feel, they know, they identify as Christians when they really aren't. The Bible says they're not, but hey, forget that. I know I am. I feel it. I feel like I'm saved, and because I feel it, it must be true. They're saved because they say so. And they say so, so it's true. They have false views of God. So what. They've got a different Jesus. So what. Oh, they're like, "None of that matters." Why? "Because I create my own Jesus if I want to. Jesus that fits what I want, and a Jesus that does what I want him to do." Why? "Because I'm God, not him."

Oh, they say they know Jesus, but they don't follow Jesus. They don't do what he says. They'll take his word and they'll reinterpret it and twist it to justify their sin and their error and their rebellion. They believe in him. But they don't really believe in him. They like him, but they don't love him. They admire him, but he doesn't have their allegiance. So they tip their cap to him every once in a while. Maybe a couple times a year, or when they hit a rough patch in life, they'll pray to the man upstairs, but they don't trust him. They don't don't live for him. And see, our text today is a gift from God because it speaks to that reality. The one we just read. The text we just

read exposes the almost Christian. See, there are Christians, and non-Christians, and almost Christians.

And they may be in the worst category because these people think that they're saved. They feel that they're saved. They have experiences about getting saved, but they aren't saved. Our text is a sword. It separates excuses from truth. It separates facts from feelings. It pierces the heart. It pierces the very soul of a person to expose the reality. To expose whether or not their true identity is one of a Christian or if their Christianity is fake, false, a facade. See, John chapter two, we've seen these three kinds of people. We have the Disciples in verse 11. They're the true believers. We have the religious authorities who reject Jesus in chapter two, verses 18 to 20. And we have these people in verse 23, who believe in Jesus, but don't really believe in Jesus.

And this is a particular sadness and burden for pastors. People who think they're Christians, but they aren't. People who seem to love the Lord, but in a crisis moment, they leave the Lord. Maybe they love their sin more. Maybe false teaching deceived them. Maybe it's a combination of factors, but they seem to be Christians. But they turn out to be almost Christians. It's not just a particular sadness for pastors. It's a particular sadness for parents as well. In a world where we choose our identity, where we say who we are and what we're not. And nobody can tell us differently. Jesus says, "Oh, yes I can. I absolutely can. I say what's real, not you. I say what's right. I say what's true. Not you."

That's true for our identities as men and women. And that is also true for our identity as Christians. He has the final say. In fact, He has the only say. We bow to Him. He does not bow to us at all. So let's see this facade of believing in verse 23. "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing." Notice that word, many. Many, means a lot of people believed in Jesus. And you've got to think about it. Despite cleaning out the temple earlier that week, despite the religious authorities rejecting him completely, despite looking really silly by saying, "I can build this temple in three days", people are still believing in him anyway. And that's because he's doing miracles. During that week when Jerusalem is swelling to some million people, Jesus was there doing miracles.

So we can guess maybe it's hundreds. Maybe it's even thousands of people believed in him. And if that's all we had verse 23, and the chapter ended there and it goes to Nicodemus, we might go, "Wow. Thousands of people believe in Jesus. That's revival. There's no revival like that. That's unbelievable." I mean, even John 1:12, it sounds a lot like that verse where it says, "To all who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." But that's not these people. And how do I know that? Because verse 24 says, "But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them." Even though they believed in him, verse 24 says Jesus was not believing in them. In fact, the word, believed, in verse 23 and the word, entrust, in verse 24 is the same exact word. He didn't trust their trust in him.

And this is a hard truth. Maybe you've been feeling it for a second. This is a hard truth, but it's one that we all have to come to grips with. We must, point #1) **Recognize all faith in Jesus isn't genuine**. Recognize, realize, embrace it. **All faith in Jesus is not genuine**. Our text is clear. Just because someone believes in Jesus doesn't mean their belief in him is authentic. There can be believers who aren't really believers. These believers in verse 23 were almost believers. Almost believers. They're impressed with Jesus. Maybe they get caught up in the excitement and the enthusiasm of a real miracle worker doing real miracles in their midst. And why do I say that? Because their belief is connected to that in verse 23. But remember that these miracles are called

signs, and signs were meant to point beyond the miracle to the reality the miracle was pointing to.

So when there's this sign that says restrooms, with an arrow, nobody looks at that sign and goes, "That's the restroom." That sign is pointing to where the restrooms actually are. And that's the idea what this word, sign. It wasn't so that they would focus on the miracle itself, but what the miracle was pointing to. And what it was pointing to is that the person that can do this miracle, he must be the son of God. That's what these miracles were pointing to. But these people marveled at the miracles and missed the point. They missed the reality that these miracles were pointing to. And it's just like Nicodemus, who we read about at the beginning of chapter three. He was there. He witnessed all of this. And speaking as one of these almost believers he said, notice in verse two, he said, "We know." So there's conviction there.

We know. And notice what he says, "You are a teacher, you are a teacher come from God for no one can do these signs that you do unless forth God is with him." There is conviction behind those words. he has true knowledge of Jesus. He knows he is a teacher. He knows he's from God. He knows he is doing miracles. And he knows that God is with him. That is significant faith. That is substantial and serious faith, but that is not saving faith. How do I know that? Because what does Jesus say in response? "Hey right on brother, let's go. Follow me and you and all the other thousands with you. Let's go." He goes, he answers him. He stops him and goes, "No, no, no, truly, truly. I say to you, unless someone is born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God."

He knew about Jesus. he had a lot of true knowledge about Jesus, but he didn't know Jesus. The text is clear. Some belief is the kind of belief that does not save. So there's a kind of faith that knows the facts about Jesus. Has true knowledge of Jesus. Is impressed with him. Admires him. Even has convictions about him but fails to truly believe him. And it's a faith that stays on the level of conviction about facts, but never moves beyond that to committing to Jesus as Savior and Lord. I mean, think about it. Let's just think about the sheer numbers here. How many people admire Jesus' teachings? Millions, maybe? How many people think that he's a prophet? Now we're in the billions, right? How many people say Jesus had a special connection with God? Now it's multiple billions, right? Just think about that. How many people are impressed with Jesus' power and influence, like these people here who think the world of all that he accomplished in just three years. Again, we're in multiple billions.

And all of that is simply describing the people here in verse 23. Believers who don't really believe. Almost Christians. And how many people are there out there who chase after signs. Who run to and fro all over the world, lusting after miracles, and yet never actually give their lives to the One who's supposedly doing those miracles. Oh, they love the excitement. Oh, they love the way that they feel, and the little quivers that happen and the, "Wow, this is amazing." And the sweat and, "Oh, it's great." They still live like people that reject Jesus completely. Because they have all those feelings, and they think all that, they're saved, right? They truly believe.

And we saw this when we went through the book of Mark. Jesus drew tens of thousands of people. When he was preaching, especially in Galilee, around the sea there. Tens of thousands of people all the time. But the crowds were not there for him, and they were not there for His teaching. You know why the crowds were there, tens of thousands of people? For the show. They were there for the show. Why? Because the same crowds that wanted to make him king screamed, "Crucify him" when he didn't give them the kind of king they demanded. Listen,

genuine faith, genuine trust in Jesus, is seen in true knowledge of Jesus, which these people had. But also that true conviction, that true knowledge leads to a changed life devoted to Jesus.

It's both, and. So could it be that you have true knowledge of Jesus, but don't truly know him? Could it be that you've almost believed in him, but your commitment is purely intellectual. It's purely emotional. It's not really genuine. Could it be that your friend or your family member, your child, needs to get saved even though they allegedly got saved years ago, but there's no commitment. There's no trust. There's no living for him.

Could it be that she needs to get saved? Because the Jesus she believes is not the Jesus revealed in the Bible. It's an imaginary Jesus. One that doesn't exist. An idol Jesus. One that fits her perfectly. Fits her sin and her rebellion perfectly but is not the real Jesus that we've been seeing in John. Could it be that all that knowledge, and all that conviction is great, but it's the first step, but needs to take the next step to commitment to Jesus. Because that's genuine faith. Conviction and commitment. That's genuine faith. That's not what these people had. And we'll see this from the facade of their belief. Let's look at the facts about their belief. Verse 23, again. "Many believed in His name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus, on His part, did not entrust himself to them." He just doesn't accept every belief in him. He's just not, "Hey, you believe, that's great. Whatever that is, awesome." No, unlike us who need discernment that comes from God's word, remember Jesus is God's word, right? Chapter one, verse one.

He didn't trust their trust. He wasn't flattered. He wasn't like, "Wow. This is revival. Look at all these people." Why? Because he knows. He can't be tricked into someone who is a genuine believer or someone who is an almost believer who seems to be a believer. He can't be tricked by that. He knew they really didn't commit to him. They may not have even known that, but he knew that. He has something to say about what kind of belief in him is true, and what kind of belief in him is not true. And it seems to the person to be genuine. It seems to the person to be acceptable. But to Jesus, it's not. Whatever their faith was, he didn't approve of it. He didn't accept it. He knows when someone believes in a way that's not really truly believing in him.

And again, that doesn't land gently on our hearts does it? We don't like that. We don't like that. Because if we say we're saved, we're saved, Right? That's why we need the Bible to wrestle us to the ground on this. So that we, point #2) **admit Jesus says who's really saved. Point #2) Admit Jesus says who's really saved.** Maybe I should put the word, alone, in there. Admit Jesus alone says who's really saved. Jesus sets the standard for what true and false faith is. He sets the standard for what a true Christian is and what an almost Christian is. He is in charge of this, not you, and not me. And it's good for all of us to remember that Jesus saves, right? Not us.

What we think about salvation, what we think constitutes salvation. What we feel about whether or not we are saved is not the final say on this. Jesus has the only say about who's really saved and who's not really saved. And for this, I take you to the most important passage on this truth. Matthew chapter seven, verse 21, Matthew 7:21. Jesus speaking 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, who is in heaven will enter. On that day, many will say to me..." Let's hear, let the force of that word hit your soul, "On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name.' And I will declare to them. I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

Let's make sure we understand what just happened. What did he say to a bunch of people who were telling him, "I'm a Christian, you're my Lord. And here's why. Here's my resume. Here's my

proof. I'm telling you Lord, that I know you. I'm saved." And to them he says what? "Your assessment of yourself is false. Your assessment of yourself doesn't matter. All those miracles, all that ministry, you think proves that you know me. Proves nothing. I don't know you." He says, "Get out of here." You think about that. You're like, "What? How in the world can he talk like that?"

John 5:22 says, "God, quote has given all judgment to him." That's why he can talk like that because he's the judge of heaven and earth. Acts 10:42, Jesus was quote, appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. And John 5:30, "His judgment quote is just." It's right. His assessment is perfect. It's perfectly aligned with God's law. And John eight 16 says his judgment is true. It's based on reality. So as the judge of all the earth, as the judge of the nations, as the judge of every human being that has ever or will ever exist, he says who's really saved. And who's not really saved. That right belongs to him alone as judge.

Oh, but if I say, "I believe", then I believe. No. If he says you believe, then you believe. Because he's the judge. He judges us. We don't ever judge him. "Well, I don't like this whole idea of judging." Well what criminal does, right? All criminals want to say, "Who are you to judge me", to which Jesus replies, "I'm God. That's who I am. Who am I to judge you? I'm your creator. Unlike you, I always and only do what's right. My judgment is not arbitrary. It's always based on fact." Now hear me clearly. This is not, you can believe all you want, but only Jesus says whether he will accept your belief or not. What this is, is Jesus setting the terms for what true belief is and what false belief is.

And when you truly believe in him, John 1:12, he gives you the right to become a child of God. But to all who don't believe in him in the way that his word says, text is clear. He doesn't believe in them. He doesn't accept their belief as genuine, just because they give it. Some belief is not genuine. It may even be based on truth about Jesus. Like we're seeing that a person is convinced about like we're seeing in Nicodemus. But if that belief never becomes trust, if it never becomes commitment, then it's not genuine saving faith.

So if you come to him truly in the way that his word says, trusting him as your savior, giving your life to him as your Lord, he will accept you. And hear me clearly on this too. This is not, your faith can be genuine, but he just doesn't accept you because he just doesn't feel like it one day. That's not what I'm saying either. That's not what this text is saying either. He says, John 6:37, "Whoever comes to me, I will never cast out." So the question is, have you really come to him. Or have you almost come to him? Is your faith in him genuine? Or are you an almost Christian. Now in saying all of that, you've got to ask yourself, "Why wasn't he believing in the belief of this probably hundreds of people who believed in his name on that day?" Well, look at verse 24. "Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man."

Jesus wasn't believing in their belief because he knew each one of them personally. He knew even what these people didn't know. That in the words of Mark 7:6, they were honoring him with their lips. But their hearts were far from him. He knew their faith in him would last just for a little while because they'd eventually fall away because of sin or distraction or hard times or even persecution. Which is what he said right, in that parable about the farmer that throws seeds and only one of those seeds would grow. The other three would all fall away for those reasons.

In other words, he knows what they didn't know, that their faith in him wasn't real. He can discern this. He can see this fact because he knows all people. All people there that week, all

people there that day who believed in him, but not really. All people, everyone. Jesus knows them all, and because of that, verse 25, he doesn't need a psychologist or sociologist to say, "Hey Jesus, let me tell you about human nature. This is what people are like." And he didn't need any of that verse 25, right? Because he needs no one to bear witness about man. You see that there? He doesn't need anybody to tell him about human beings. Why? Verse 25. Because he himself, don't miss that word, himself. John puts that there to go, he and he alone, knows what is in man. Translation, he knows humanity better than we know ourselves.

Not only did he have 30 years of interaction with humans, with a perfect mind and perfect insight into every single conversation that he ever had with every single person. But he had all of that. Why? Because he's God. He is the judge, as we just saw. And he is the judge who knows all people. And as the all-knowing judge, we need to point #3) ***Understand Jesus knows everything about everyone.*** Understand it, embrace it. Believe it. ***Jesus knows everything about everyone.*** The text is clear. It's not hyperbole. Jesus knows everything. And he knows everything about everyone. And that can only be true of Jesus as what? God, exactly.

That's been John's message from the very beginning. It's John's message throughout this book. He knows everything about everyone because he is God. God is Omniscient. And as God, as Omniscient, he knows everything about everyone. First King's 8:39 puts it this way. Quote, render to each whose hearts you know, according to all his ways for you and then the emphasis, for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind. God knows what's going on in every single human heart. And because Jesus is God, he knows it too. For us, knowing our hearts is truly impossible, right? Jeremiah 17:9 asks the question. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it?" Rhetorical question. Answer, no one, not one of us. But then God responds in the very next verse. Verse 10. "I, the Lord searched the heart and test the mind to give to every man, according to his ways."

He knows each one of our hearts. He knows how to one of our hearts have impacted our lives. We can't even scratch the surface of any of that without God's word. He knows it perfectly. We are Proverbs 21:2, "Every way of a man seems right in his own eyes", right? We think what we do it's right. Whatever we think it's right, whatever we feel it's right. The rest of the verse says, but the Lord weighs the heart. He decides the truth about what we think and say, and feel, and do. We look at outward appearance all the time, right? We get fooled by it all the time, right? And I've been fooled by outward appearance many times, but not Jesus. No. First Samuel 7:6, we look on the outward appearance, but God what, he looks on the heart. He sees into every one of our souls.

This makes him the worst possible judge for criminals to stand before. He has all the facts. He understands all the facts accurately. He knows the law perfectly because the law is an expression of who he is. He sees what no one else sees. He knows what no one else knows. He knows everything about every one of us. And that's why he can say whose trust in him is genuine, and whose trust in him is not genuine.

See, some wear the man mask of religion to try to fool him. Others try the mask of good works to deceive him. Others still, use the mask of religious knowledge. "I know the Bible, got it memorized." He can see through it all. He can spot a genuine Christian and an almost Christian from 10 billion miles away. He knows the secrets of our hearts. He lays bare our secret sins. Every secret thing will come to light. He will bring every secret into judgment. We may have been able to keep a secret or two from everyone who knows us, but we've never kept anything

from him. The judge knows everything about you. There's nothing that you've ever thought, said, felt, or did that he didn't have a front row seat for.

You may have been able to deceive everyone you've ever interacted with, but you have never deceived him for even a fraction of a second. See as people, we see the leaves and the branches and the fruit on the trees. He sees all of that and he sees the root. He knows what's true about every one of us. We saw this in Nathaniel, right in chapter one, he reads his mail before he even meets him. We're going to see it in chapter three with Nicodemus. He reads his heart, and we're going to see it in chapter four, right? With that woman that he meets at the well. Gives her entire relationship history before. He's just met her. Why? How can he do that? Because he knows everything about everyone. Everything about everyone.

So for some of you, this text should be a wakeup call. It should upset you, right? But quit messing around with Jesus. He's not... He's not falling for the show. Quit it with the games. You may be fooling all of us, but you're not fooling him. And he's really the only one that matters. Repent today. Enough of admiring. Enough of the rebellion. Repent, give your life to him, believe in him, and listen to me. He will forgive you of everything he knows about you. Everything. All of it, forever. And for the rest, this text should be an incredible encouragement to worship. Think about it. The one who knows the real you, loves the real you. You just let that sink in for a second. The one who knows the real you, that maybe nobody else knows, Loves the real you.

And it's only when we know that he knows everything about us, and that the everything he knows about us is not all that pretty. It's only when we know this about Jesus, that we can truly appreciate just how much he loves sinners when he died on the cross. I mean, it's one thing to love your social media profile, right? It's the best picture out of 15 that you took, right? Edited. Special effects to enhance just how awesome we are.

It's another thing to know every single thing about us and love us anyway. One author put it this way. I thought it was brilliant. He said, "It's not hard to love someone who is lovely. We all do that. Right? It's easy. It's often possible to love someone who is unlovely. Some people do that occasionally, but to love someone who is rebellious, proud, arrogant, corrupt, ruthlessly independent, and who will crucify the very one who most loves him. That is real love. Of that sort of love, only God is capable." The one who knows you the best loves you the most. Again, let that truth wash over your soul. That is grace. That's what grace is. That not only... That only fills our hearts with worship and gratitude right now. Right? But it's that love. It's that mercy. It's that grace that will fill our hearts with gratitude for endless ages.

Let's pray. Jesus, we sang earlier, how marvelous, how wonderful is your love for me? And because of this text, we get a glimpse of just how otherworldly that love is. So it is appropriate for us to sing another song to you, and to sing of your glory. To sing of your goodness. It's good for all of us when, like a teeter totter, you go up and we go down. That's good. It doesn't feel good in the moment, but it is really good. Because when you're lifted up, you draw people closer to you. So that's my prayer today, that as we have seen you clearly that we will recognize we're not sovereign, you are. We're not judges, you are. You're the one that this whole thing is about, not us. And that is a really good thing. Because we will... We may not see that here, but when we see you face to face, it'll all make sense. Help us please, to live our lives in light of that day. I pray in your wonderful name. Amen.

