

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

WHAT ABOUT THE OPRESSION OF MINORITIES, WOMEN, AND OTHERS? |

DECONSTRUCT | RECONSTRUCT

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Alright, what's up Traders Point family? Hope you guys are having a great day. Man, it's been such a great day for me personally because Lindsay and I got the opportunity to baptize our youngest this morning. So we're super thrilled about that. Man, there isn't anything that you can do or say that is going to make me have a bad day because of that.

I'm really glad you guys are here. I want to welcome you across all of our locations and if you're joining us online. We're super thrilled that you are with us.

If you have a Bible go ahead and get it open to the book of Galatians in the New Testament because that's where we are going to be spending all of our time together today.

And as you are turning there, and as you're getting situated, I just want you to know that last Sunday night we had our very first campus Vision Night at our Plainfield campus. We just had an incredible time getting together. I've got a few images of that evening behind me.

We got together to worship and to talk and we were just really celebrating all that God has done in our past, as a church, and then asking the question, "Okay, God. What do You want to do next in and through us?"

We just had an incredible time and I want you to experience and be a part of that as well. So we're doing our own little Eras tour, we're bringing this to a campus near you. Alright? All of the 15-year-old girls got that and they love Mia Ford. Alright?

But we're bringing this to a campus near you. The next one is Friday night at our Carmel campus at 7 p.m. And then next Sunday evening at our Downtown campus at 6 p.m. Midtown, Fishers, and Northwest you can see the dates and times and locations on the screen behind me.

I really want to encourage you to make this a priority and be there. You don't need to RSVP. There is going to be kids programming. If you're looking at the date of your campus Vision Night and you're like, "Oh, I've already got plans," or, "I'm going to be out of town," come to another one. It's going to be the exact same content and we don't want you to miss it.



And every person who shows up in person to a campus Vision Night gets free merch. Right? You get a free t-shirt. I know how to get you guys to things. Alright? Free t-shirts and these shirts won't be available until later in the fall, but if you come to Vision Night you get one and you get it free. So I want to encourage you to be there for that.

Well, if you're just now joining us whether in person or online, we have been in a series of messages (we have two weeks left) where we've just been covering some really light, fluffy topics that all of us kind of see eye to eye on and that we have no opinions about.

Actually, we've been covering some really tough topics. I was talking to somebody about this earlier today. I think that part of the reason why the last few weeks (and today is going to be no different) have been a little bit tense is because we are just not used to hearing about topics like this without them being incredibly emotional and divisive.

So what I'm trying to do is I'm trying to model for us a third way, to be able to talk about these things, candidly and rationally—more than that, passionately, for sure, but mostly pastorally. We want to be able to think deeply and thoughtfully about these really, really important issues.

And really the idea is that we've just been taking a handful of topics, not an exhaustive list by any means, but just a handful of topics that are oftentimes at the center of somebody's decision to deconstruct.

Now, deconstruction, if you are not familiar with the term is a term for people who used to consider themselves a believer or a Christian, maybe they grew up in church or at one time or another they considered themselves to be a person of faith and then something happened.

Maybe you went through a crisis or a season of suffering and pain and you just cried out to God, "God, where are You? And why would You bring this into my life. And why did You allow this? Why wouldn't you deliver me from it?" And those are really good questions.

But then you took those questions to an authority figure, maybe a pastor or a teacher or a parent, and you didn't get any good answers to them. Or worse yet, maybe the reaction to you was one of anger or defensiveness. Or maybe they shamed you. And you were kind of like, "Well, if that's going to be the response, then I'm out."

Or maybe you grew up in somewhat of a legalistic, strict, religious household and then you went off to college and you saw this whole other way of living and you were like, "Oh, man. Sin is fun." And you just pursued a different lifestyle and you followed your heart wherever that was going to go. You were just being true to yourself. You were just following after that, and so you entered into this journey, so to speak, to take apart, dismantle, reshape, or in many instances abandon the faith all together.



You take that with an absence of a really clear and compelling reasoning for the intent of God's plans and purposes for your life, that maybe the church hasn't historically provided, and it's a recipe for deconstruction.

Now, all of those topics are the background. And really what I want to invite you to do is not to deconstruct but to reconstruct, to reconstruct a more durable, authentic faith.

That really brings me to what we're talking about today. Oftentimes, when it comes to somebody's deconstruction, what ends up happening is that the deconstruction was not of a—here's how I'm going to phrase it—real Christianity but a poor or false representation of it.

I would say that there is a massive difference between authentic faith and nominal belief. Like religion in name only, Christian as a label, and somebody who laid their life down seeking to follow after Jesus living a gospel centered life. There is a massive, massive difference. And sometimes we get the two confused.

I would say that all of us have probably had this experience where maybe you went to purchase something. You made a purchase. Maybe it was a pair of Air Jordans or a designer purse and when you got it and you looked at it up close, you were like, "Wow. This is a fake. This is just a poor replica of the real thing."

When I was in the Holy Land a few months ago we were in Bethlehem walking down the street and we came across a coffee house, maybe you recognize the logo. It was not a Starbucks, it was a Squarebucks. And then a few blocks down we ran into another one, Stars and Bucks. Poor replicas of the real thing. That's kind of what I want to present to you today.

I don't know where you stand with God or where you are in your spiritual journey, I would just ask you, today, if somebody were to ask you who or what a Christian is, how would you articulate that?

Think about if you were to go out on the street in downtown Indianapolis and just walked up to a stranger and say, "Who or what is a Christian?" You might get a wide variety of answers. You might get a whole cocktail of a response, having to do with people's political views, or social views, and maybe it's not anywhere near the real thing that we find, that Jesus died for us to have.

Here's quite possibly an explanation, if you were to ask somebody that question. He might say something along these lines, "Well, a Christian is somebody who believes in God, and is trying to be a good person, is following a very strict, complex set of rules that is then imposed onto other people."

I would say that for many people that's their understanding of what Christianity is. And I would contend that that is a false or a poor version of the real thing.

Here's the question on the table that has caused many people to deconstruct their faith and walk away. They've been led to believe that Christianity is oppressive, that religion is

harmful to other people and the good of society, in particular to minorities and to women.

Unfortunately this is not anything new. This was happening 2,000 years ago in the church in Galatia. This is what prompted Paul to write a letter to the Galatians. And in it he writes these words. Check it out with me. *Chapter 1, verses 6 and 7. Paul says:*

"I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ."

Why is he saying so soon? Because these are first generation Christians. They've given their lives to Jesus for the very first time, not that long ago. And already they are beginning to deconstruct and walk away or follow a different way. That's what he says in the very next sentence. He goes:

"You are following a different way," here's the key word, "that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ." Galatians 1:6-7 (NLT)

So it's not an outright lie, it's just a twisting of the truth. Now, how were they doing this? By propagating some sort of fringe belief system? Well, no. What they were doing is they were actually allowing their faith to sort of disintegrate into what we might call legalism and even oppression.

And in the letter to the Galatians, Paul actually calls out two individuals by name who should have known better. A guy named Peter, maybe you recognize that name, he was one of Jesus' disciples who did a ton of good for the kingdom. And then a guy named Barnabas, whose name actually means *encourager* or *an encouragement*.

Paul calls them out because here's what Peter and Barnabas had slipped into. They forgot that the gospel message was for other ethnicities, in particular the Gentiles of the day, and so they were refusing to have anything to do with them. They wouldn't even share a meal with them. And Paul gets up in their faces and confronts them on it. And it caused him to say this in chapter 2 of Galatians, verse 16, he goes:

"...we know that a person is," here are two really critical words, made right. "...made right with God," How? Not by actions. Not by trying to be a good person but, "by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law.

"And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God," notice this is past tense, this is passive, this is something that is done for you and in your place, not something you can earn, "because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law." Galatians 2:16 (NLT)

What is Paul doing here? Well, he's deconstructing false, toxic religion and he's replacing it with real Christianity. He says, "We're not justified by obeying the law." Now, this doesn't mean that we throw the law out, the law is good. Jesus affirmed the law. We

don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. It's the understanding, though, that none of us can be saved by obeying the law. Okay?

Well, what's the purpose of the law? You've heard me say this before. It's a mirror. The law shows us that we are sinners in need of the grace of God. There is no way that we could ever live up to all of that.

Actually, if you could follow the law, cross every *t* and dot every *i* to perfection, God says that equals holiness, that equals righteousness. And there isn't anybody who can do it, except for Jesus.

So, obviously we would say that the law is good and it is right, but we don't hold it legalistically, we don't hold it up to other people to say, "You've got to do as I do in order to be justified in God's eyes."

No, we have a standing before God because of what Jesus has done for us, and then from that standing we bring every other area of our life into alignment with Jesus Christ. That is real Christianity.

Now, here's the question on the table. Society will look at this and say, "You know, I think that Christianity is oppressive and it has mistreated people, in particular minorities and women."

And this is a vitally important question that those of us who are genuinely seeking to follow after Jesus need to take seriously and we need to recognize that there have been those in our past and in our present, who wear the name Christian, who have been oppressive and they have mistreated others.

Those of us who are genuinely seeking to follow after Jesus, we should empathize with that and we should actually genuinely seek to understand somebody else's experience and not get defensive or angry or say things like, "Well, I've never done that." Or, "I don't know exactly what that feels like." We should, as Romans 12 urges us to do, mourn with those who mourn, grieve with those who grieve.

I've gotten a lot of response from last week's message—imagine that. And actually a bunch of you have asked... Ninety nine point nine percent of it has been very good. I would say mostly the word I have gotten is just *grateful*. People have been grateful.

But the part of the message that I've gotten the most feedback on is that empathy piece. We don't see it modeled very often. We live in a cancel culture where if you disagree with me, you're dead to me. So we need to practice empathy more, especially as Christians. And empathy means...

There is one person clapping. I appreciate that. And by the way, you can clap today. Some of you are like, "Does the rule from last week still on?" No. You can clap. You can say *amen*.

I know this is a tense conversation. I'm just going to put that out there. We need to talk about it. And we need to talk about it in a way that is non-emotional and that is not



divisive, because this is something that is very, very biblical. And it's something we've got to get our heads around. So, we need to grieve with those who grieve.

Here's what we've got to do. By the way, Christianity is tension. It's tension between grace and truth. It's tension between acceptance and affirmation. It's a tension that we hold. If you guys have been around here a while you might remember my rubber band analogy, we've got to hold tension in play. And we're not good at that in our society.

On the one hand we need to hold that... Man, we're so, so grateful for the country in which we live. I love America. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. I'm so grateful for the men and women in the military and in law enforcement who have made sacrifices to give us the country that we have. We can acknowledge that. We can celebrate that. We can hold that in one hand.

And then in the other hand, and this doesn't diminish this over here, we can also, as Christians, recognize the stain and pain of racism in our past. More specifically, people who call themselves Christian who participated in the slave trade. People who called themselves Christians who were for segregation.

People who called themselves Christians, specifically in the 1920s, who were a part of the Ku Klux Klan. There is this infamous image from a church in Oregon in the 1920s, I'll just show it briefly where you've got Klansmen in their garb in a church, in a choir loft, singing hymns under a banner that says Jesus Saves.

This is such a toxic, misrepresentation of Christianity. And it is so, so damaging to those who don't really understand the heart of the gospel message.

It is also true that there are, have been, and continue to be churches, religious movements, and various institutions that wear the name Christian that have taken advantage of and been abusive toward women.

There are horrible instances of abuse and abuse cover up. There are far too many women who have been in an abusive marriage or they are the victims of domestic violence. They tried to articulate that to maybe a pastor or a religious leader or an authority figure of some kind and they were simply not believed. And it is swept under the rug.

Or they say things like, "Well, what are you doing wrong? What's your contribution to this?" Or, "You need to forgive and to submit." And it's putting their lives at continued risk.

Let me say this today. If you have ever felt the pain of oppression or marginalization or you have been abused at the hand of somebody who calls themselves a Christian, I want to genuinely express sorrow over that. There is no excuse for it.

That's not how God designed you to be treated. That's not what Jesus died for you to have. Jesus sees you as a valued child, a son or a daughter of the King and a valued member of His family.

So, as Christians, we don't go, "Well, I've never been guilty of that." No, as Christians we empathize with those who have. And we say, "Oh, man. I'm so sorry that's your experience." That is the only place that we can begin to have a conversation around it that can bring about real healing that only Jesus can bring.

It's a really, really delicate issue. I know that. And I think it's important that we recognize the difference between real, authentic Christianity and the false, toxic representation of it that is far too common, and that hurts people.

I think, oftentimes within our culture, in the western world... We have tendency in the western world to think that we're center of the world anyway, but I think that oftentimes when it comes to Christianity and religion we think that this sort of started in the Midwest, the buckle of the Bible Belt and it's just kind of gone out to the rest of the world.

I've heard people say things to me like, "You know, Aaron, you're only a Christian because you were born in the Midwest." And I am like, "Well, number one: I was born in Baltimore, thank you very much. And number two: I know Christians who have been born in other parts of the world." This didn't get started in Kansas. Alright?

Here's what I mean, a few years ago there was all of this outrage (maybe some of you remember this) when Chick-fil-A started its first restaurant in New York City. There were a bunch of people upset because there was a company with Christian based values, out of the Midwest, that was launching in an urban city like New York.

There were a bunch of articles written on it. They actually called it an infiltration. They said that because a company who is selling really good chicken sandwiches and excellent waffle fries has these Christian values, they are coming into the city and there's been an infiltration, that Christianity is oppressive toward certain groups, ethnicities, and women.

This is what prompted a professor from Yale University, named Steven Carter—I'm not quite sure where he lands faith wise, but here's what he said. He goes, "If you are maligning Christianity, you are not maligning the people you think you are. Around the globe, the people most likely to be Christians," when you take the entire world, throughout time, and even today, "are women of color."

He is saying that real Christianity throughout history and in Scripture was never meant to be a movement that was oppressive, but it was for the good of every human being and for the flourishing of communities, including women and people from every ethnicity.

Christianity got started primarily as a movement crossing ethnic lines. It was started with the Jews and crossed the ethnic line into the Gentiles, the Greek.

This was a movement that, when you study the history of it in the First Century... Originally woman flocked toward Christianity because they were so mistreated and abused by Roman society.

And that brings us back to Paul's argument in Galatians 3. We looked at these verses last week and I want to look at them again today. He writes these stunning words in verses 26 through 28. He says:

"For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have," notice the terminology, "put on Christ, like putting on new clothes." So as a result of that, "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26-28 (NLT)

This is the essence of real Christianity. And what you need to understand is that when Paul wrote these words, not only would they have been revolutionary, they would have been extremely controversial in the Jewish society of the day.

Here's why. The typical Jewish man woke up every morning and after his cup of coffee he would pray this daily prayer. Not saying it's right. I'm saying this is what they would pray, "God, thank you that I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman."

In other words they would say, "God, thank You that You made me a Jew, that You made me a man, and You made me free."

Now, what they were doing is they found their sense of worth and identity in their ethnicity, their gender, and their socio economic status.

And Paul is coming directly against that kind of thinking and he said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa guys. When you put your trust in Jesus you were clothed in Christ. So the most important thing about you is your identity in Jesus. And this invitation wasn't offered to you because you were a Jewish man, this invitation was offered to every ethnicity, to every gender, and to people across the socio economic status."

Now, all of us today look to clothe ourselves in something. We've been doing it since Genesis 3. In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sin came into the world, they realized that they were naked and vulnerable for the very first time. What did they do? They made some clothes out of fig leaves and they covered themselves. And we've been doing it ever since.

I just want to ask you today to do a little bit of self-evaluation. What are you clothing yourself in? I'm not talking about Abercrombie and Fitch, or whatever your thing is. Right? That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about where are you finding your sense of worth and identity?

Many of us are clothing ourselves in our accomplishments. We're clothing ourselves in our reputation or our career or the amount in our bank account. Many of us are finding our sense of worth and identity in athletics or maybe some sort of skill that we have. Or maybe it's in some sort of community that we are a part of.



It's not that those things can't be a part of who you are, Paul just says that as a Christ follower, they are not primary. Your primary identity is that you have clothed yourself in Christ and that invitation is made for all.

So, I want us to understand this. Christianity is both radically inclusive and radically exclusive. There is tension there.

It's radically exclusive in the sense that Jesus calls Himself the door. And on the other side of the door is life, abundant, joy filled, fulfilling life. And He would say all are invited through the door. Both Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free. All are invited. It is radically exclusive because Jesus is the only door, but it is radically inclusive in the sense that it is an invitation made to everyone.

And Paul says in the passage it's made to both Jew and Gentile. So what he is saying is that your ethnicity is not what makes you right with God. There is no ethnicity that has a leg up on the others. And God is also not trying to eliminate ethnicities, He's trying to illuminate Himself through ethnicities. He is drawing all people unto Himself from every single background.

Here's the way that Revelation describes it. Every tongue, nation, and tribe—all ethnicities coming before God. This is why we still have so much work to do in this, but we will continue to pursue it. The church should be a multi-ethnic representation of the kingdom of God.

The church should look more like a salad bowl than an egg carton, not because we're trying to be politically correct or make some sort of political statement, but because of Revelation 21 where it says that the kingdom of God is multi-ethnic. People from every tribe and nation and tongue come before the Lamb of God and His throne as a unified body of people.

So God's not seeking homogeneity, He's seeking unity in diversity. And the over arching theme of Scripture from Genesis through Revelation is extremely clear. God is out to destroy the dividing wall of hostility and create one new man from among every nation of men, under our brown skinned, Middle Eastern Savior.

Jesus came to establish the most multi-ethnic movement in history and He did. I want to show you this graphic. This is coming from Pew Research. Christianity is the most evenly distributed movement in the world. So let me show you what this looks like on a map.

Most world religions came from and are localized to a specific geographic region. Now, I'm not saying that there aren't people from all of these world religions who live in various places around the world. I'm saying that they are very localized.

Hinduism, very localized to India. Buddhism, very localized to parts of Asia. Islam, very localized to the Middle East. But Christianity is global. In fact, Christianity, where it is

exploding the most... I would say that America is quickly becoming one of the nations' biggest mission fields. There are other countries sending missionaries to us.

But where Christianity is exploding is in the Southern Hemisphere in places like China where the church is persecuted. It is not localized to the Midwest. It is global.

Paul also says here: slave and free. When Paul writes this he is referring to the socio economic status of the day, because slavery in Roman culture was not race based slavery as much as it was economic based slavery. There were the wealthy and the poor. So Paul is saying the invitation and the way to Jesus is made to everyone regardless of socio economic status, which, once again, would have been so revolutionary in their day.

Historically the people who are the most likely to give their lives to Jesus are the economically poor. Now, that doesn't mean that it is impossible if you are wealthy to give your life to Jesus, that's not what that means—that is poverty theology.

Jesus would say that it is harder. And I think the reason why it's harder is because there is only one thing that you need in order to become a Christian—need. And oftentimes for those of us who have clothed ourselves in our resources, it's much more difficult for us to see that.

By the way, you can have a lot of money or no money at all and it will still be an idol because you're too focused on it. As Tim Keller would say, "Money is God's chief competition for the throne of our hearts."

When Christianity first got launched, it was the first movement that took care of the poor. It was the first movement that advocated for the rights of every human being.

In Roman society, not only were women mistreated, but females were looked down upon worse than that. So a lot of female infants were either put to death or abandoned. And it was the Christians who brought them in and started this first like foster movement, orphanage type movement, where they were rescuing female infants.

And throughout history we see that Christians were some of the first to care for the poor. Many Christians started our first hospitals, our first orphanages.

Luc Ferry, a French philosopher wrote a popular little book entitled *A Brief History of Thought*. He is not a Christian but he writes from an historical perspective. And this is what he writes:

I must recognize that we essentially have human rights in our world because of Christianity. It is quite clear that in this Christian reevaluation of the human person, the philosophy of human rights of which we subscribe to today, would have never established itself.

So understand what he was saying, He was saying that it was the Christians who first had a reevaluation of people, the human person.

What does that mean? It means that Christians saw that there was value in every single human being regardless of who they were, what they could contribute to society, or how far along they were maturity wise. Human beings have value in and of themselves. Why? Because we are made in the image of our heavenly Father. We are image bearers of God.

This is why, when it comes to an issue that is so divisive and emotional within our society—the issue of abortion—it oftentimes gets framed this way, “You can either be pro-life or pro-women.”

Christianity would say, “No. We must be both.” Because the image of God is placed upon the unborn so we speak for the unborn and we come around women who find themselves in a vulnerable spot to minister and care for them. This is not an either/or, as society would say. We must do both because the image of God is placed upon the unborn.

Lastly, Paul says male and female. And Jesus stepped into a world that devalued, discarded, and dismissed women and He elevate their status. As I’ve already said, in Roman culture they mistreated and abused women. They saw them as property. And their testimony was not valid in court.

And then Jesus comes along and just turned that all upside down. Jesus elevated women from His birth to His death to His resurrection. The announcement of Jesus’ birth was made to a woman. Jesus was born from the womb of a woman. Jesus healed both men and women. He included women in His parables which was unheard of at the time.

One of my favorite stories is of two sisters: Mary and Martha. Martha had the gift of hospitality and Jesus was there teaching at their house. Martha is in the kitchen. She’s preparing the charcuterie board. Did I say that right? I always say that word wrong.

She’s in the kitchen preparing all of that and she gets so frustrated with her sister and she was like, “Jesus, would you tell Mary to come in here and help me?”

And Jesus, instead of doing that affirms Mary. What was Mary doing? She was sitting at the feet of Jesus with the rest of the men listening. And Jesus says, “No, she is where she should be.”

The resurrection was discovered and announced by women.

Jesus elevated the status of women. Therefore, in the very first movement of Christians... Women in the First Century flocked to Him.

And here’s why. Professor Rodney Starke who was a professor of sociology writes these words. He said, “The early church was attractive to women, including women of high status, because within the Christian subculture, women enjoyed far higher status than women in the Greco-Roman world at large.”

Now, you might read that and you might say, “Okay. But it doesn’t really explain, Aaron, why cases of domestic abuse and violence and divorce rates seem to be just as high inside the church as outside the church.”

I would say, “Yep. That is a tragedy.” And I would also say that’s not a result of real Christianity. That is a result of toxic Christianity. A false representation. A fraud. It’s fake.

Here's what I mean. There is an author by the name of Nancy Pearcey, I’ve been recommending her book *Love Thy Body*. Her newest book is on toxic masculinity. I can’t recommend that highly enough either.

And in it she actually distinguishes, she makes this distinction, between what she calls nominal Christian men and what I would just call godly Christian men.

Not perfect men, but men who are laying their life down, who are following the way of Jesus: sacrificial love, growing in the fruit of the Spirit, seeking to go first by following after Jesus. There is a massive difference between those two.

And she would say nominal Christian men are defined as those who identify with religious tradition because of their family or cultural background.

Well what does that mean? Maybe they grew up Catholic or Baptist but they haven’t been to church in years or they only show up on Christmas and Easter. They are Christians in name only. There is no fruit of the Spirit. There is no changeable difference in the way that they are living their lives.

And she would point out that research backs this up. It is found that nominal Christian men have the highest rates of divorce and domestic violence, even higher than outright secular men. They spend less time with their children. Their wives report significantly lower levels of happiness. Their marriages are fragile.

Whereas Christian men are 35 percent less like to divorce than secular men, nominals are 20 percent more likely to divorce than secular men. These numbers are tragic and staggering. They tell us that it would be better for you to be outright secular than for you to just be nominal in your faith.

However, there is some good news for this. Real, authentic Christ following men, the stats show that they shatter the negative stereotypes of religious men. They are more loving to their wives, and emotionally engaged with their children than any other group in America. They are the least likely to divorce. They have the lowest levels of domestic abuse and violence.

Oftentimes... We’ve heard this for years. I’ve actually said this from this platform and I’ve been wrong. We see that the divorce rate inside the church is just as high as those outside the church, but actually that’s not true.

Marriages of couples who are genuinely seeking to follow after God, their divorce rates are much, much lower and the divorce rate of nominal Christian couples are much, much higher. And this skews the percentages.

Sociologist Brad Wilcox, one of the nation's top experts on marriage summarized his research in *Christianity Today*. Here's what he says. This is tragic:

"The most violent husbands in America are nominal evangelical Protestants who attend church infrequently or not at all."

That's sad. It should rip our hearts out. You take that blended with men who are genuinely seeking to follow after Jesus, it just skews the percentages.

So what do we do with that? Well, this is the invitation to no longer be nominal, but to go all in. What is that? Paul ends this in chapter 5 of Galatians in verse one. He says this:

"So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law." Galatians 5:1 (NLT)

And then in verse 13 he says:

"For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love." Galatians 5:13 (NLT)

I think one of the biggest distinguishing marks of a nominal Christian and a real Christian is to say, "I'm going to serve these other people in love. I'm going to lay down my life because Jesus laid down His life for me."

The highest ethic in our society today is tolerance. That's why we hear about it so often. And it sounds so good too. But it's misleading. See the highest ethic for Christians is not tolerance. It's love. Love is greater than tolerance.

Listen. Jesus doesn't just tolerate you. He loves you. Tolerance didn't put Jesus on the cross. Love did. And love says this, "Man, I accept you and receive you no matter what. You are welcome here."

But love says something greater. Tolerance says, "Hey, come here just as you are and you can stay that way. You do you." Love says, "No. You are received the way that you are, but God loves you far too much to leave you there." He wants you to grow. He wants you to clothe yourself in Jesus. There is a better way that leads to human flourishing and it's not the tolerance that society promotes.

This is why it's so confusing. I'm going to have to preach a whole sermon on this at some point, somehow I'm going to have to do it because I get so many who come in here and we confuse the Biblical script with the secular script and we just confuse this idea of acceptance and affirmation. Just because you're accepted doesn't mean that you are affirmed in every area of life. That is not the gospel.

I don't want you to affirm me in every area of life. You want to know why? Because I've got to grow. I've got to change. I've got to be transformed. I've got to leave the old ways behind and grow to look more and more like Jesus.

So here's the invitation today. Two groups of people. For those of you who know, "I am not a Christian and I thought being a Christian meant somebody who just generally believes in God, trying to be a good person, following a complex set of rules that they impose onto others."

That is not a Christian. I want to invite you to the real thing. To come through the door of Jesus Christ. You are received and welcome as you are, radically inclusive. Radically exclusive because Jesus is the only One who can bring you back to life.

Second invitation. For those of you sitting here today listening to this whether you are in an auditorium, you're in your car, you're in your living room, your kitchen or you're on a treadmill, and you realize, "Right now, I'm a nominal. I've got one foot in and one foot out. I'm just kind of like casually following after Jesus." Or, "I've mixed the scripts."

The invitation is for you to simply lay that down and to go all in. And to clothe yourself in Christ and to realize, "The most important thing is my identity in Christ. Everything else is a distant second." And that is the only way for this to be the best news for you in your life and for the rest of society. So would you come? Would you come?

Father, we're so grateful that You didn't just tolerate us. You loved us. And You gave Your everything so that we might be received, forgiven, changed, and transformed.

So, God, I pray that today we could grieve with those who grieve who have been hurt and abused and damaged by toxic religion. But that we would step into real, authentic faith, which means repentance and brokenness and change. Because You gave Your all for us, we give our all for You.

So, Father, from that standing would You declare us righteous by the finished work of Jesus. God we simply receive and we ask that Your Holy Spirit would come into us and change as people, from the inside out. Because right now we have this society that is desperately looking for not only a definition but a real life living example of what a true Christian is.

So, God, may we step into that by Your grace. And we ask this in Jesus' name. And everyone said: Amen.

