

Come Out Of The Shadows

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[0 : 00] I'm looking at Colossians chapter 2, and it's in your pew Bible on page 189.

And Paul has preached the gospel in Ephesus.

The gospel has been taken up country to the city of Colossae, and there it has been preached.

And in response to the preaching of that gospel, people have gathered themselves together into a fellowship of the gospel, which is the church.

And Paul has watched that young church grow and develop, and he has seen some strange and wonderful things happen.

[1 : 11] What he has seen is that by the preaching of the gospel, people have come out of the shadow of their religious understanding into the light.

They've come from the shadow to the substance. They've come from a copy of things to the original.

They have come from the elemental spirits of the universe to Christ himself. They've come from the appearance of things into the reality of the gospel.

So that's how the church was formed. It came out of the shadows into the substance, which is Christ. And what Paul sees happening to the church now under the influence of its teachers, who are quite sincere, we have no reason to doubt that, and perhaps out of the demand of the congregation, they say, Okay, we like this, but now take us back into the shadows.

Because nobody likes to stand in the light where the reality is. Now, what happens then is when they get into the shadows, then religion begins to work the way most people think religion works.

[2 : 57] Because this isn't the fellowship of the gospel. This is the religion of the shadows, the elemental spirits of the universe, the kind of basic spiritual dimension of the creation.

So when they are in the shadows, the people, the teachers coming out of those shadows, bring three charges against the Christians.

This new Christian church, this Christian congregation. Look at verse 8. That's the first thing he says to them as to what is happening.

You are being made a prey. You are being taken captive. You are being spoiled, verse 8, by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition.

So that the reality of the gospel is being spoiled by these teachers. Then it goes on and says the second thing that's happening, and this is in verse 16.

[4 : 17] Look at it. Therefore, let no one pass judgment. Or in the NIV it says, let no one condemn you.

They were being condemned. They thought they had come out of condemnation, and now when they went to church, they were being condemned.

And then if you look in verse 18, the third thing that was happening was, they who thought that they had won the prize of eternal life, not won it but received it by the grace of God, were suddenly being told, I'm sorry, you're disqualified.

So you see in verse 18 where it says, let no one disqualify you. So the impact of the teaching was to take captive their minds, to condemn them, and to disqualify them.

And then if you look in verse 20, they were beginning, under the impact of this, to live as though they still belonged to the world.

[5 : 41] Now, a lot of people that I run into in the course of any given week think that if you would like to be spoiled, condemned, and disqualified, the best place to be is at church on Sunday morning.

And then you will be told the condemnation that belongs to you, you'll be told the philosophy that confuses you, and you will be told why you are disqualified from that which belongs to you in Christ.

And that happens all the time. So you see, the church of the shadows has moved into the reality of the gospel in Christ, and then it moves back into the shadows.

And not only is the teacher, or are the teachers responsible for this, the people who stand in this pulpit responsible for this, but you go along with it.

And in verse 20, you forget that having died with Christ, you live as though you still, you know, you still belong to the world.

[6 : 59] So that's what happens. And so the church is a whole lot of people living in the light being dragged back into the shadows, or people who living in the light prefer to go back into the shadows.

And they feel deceived, condemned, and disqualified, and they give up and no longer live in the reality which is Christ, but they move back into the world of shadows.

That all comes from verse 17, which I want you to look at now, which says simply, of those things that belong to the shadowy world of religion, these are only a shadow of what is to come.

Now be careful to remember that something has to cast a shadow. Shadows don't exist where there is no reality. Shadows exist because there is a reality.

But you're not to live with the shadow, you're to live with the reality. So a lot of people live their lives in the shadow of the gospel, but not in touch with the gospel.

[8 : 30] Two other words which are used in the theological word book about this suggest that you live in the copy, but not with the original.

You live with the appearance, but not the reality. And so Paul is saying that that's the problem.

Now if you look at the things that are characteristic of the shadow world of religion, you will see, and I have listed them here for you, philosophies, human traditions, elemental spirits, food, drink, festival, new moon, Sabbath, self-abasement, tongues of angels, visions, regulations, touch not, handle not, taste not, all those things.

Now we don't live in a world which is devoid of those. We live in a world which has a surfeit of those things. But Paul says those things are all part of the shadow.

They're not the substance or the reality, which is Christ. Christ. So, if you, if you look at that and go to verse 19 now, let me show you what it says about the reality.

[9 : 59] It says, the reality, and it expresses it in negative terms because it's saying that the teachers, the people who are leading the Bible study groups, the people who are preaching the sermons, the people who are preparing confirmation classes, they have a tendency to lose touch with the reality, not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

The shadowy world is the world that has lost touch with the head, lost touch with Christ. And so, it's not hard for me to imagine that what happens in a congregation like this is that people have a shadowy awareness of a reality which they have never experienced.

by the grace of God and the preaching of the gospel, they come to see the reality of which formerly they only knew the shadow.

But then, having discovered the reality, they can slip back into the shadows, that that's what can happen to a congregation like this.

And the reason that that happens is we lose touch with the head, as in, we lose touch with Christ. Verse 17 that talks about the substance uses the word body, that within the body of Christ, subject to the headship of Christ, you should experience not the shadow but the reality.

[12 : 03] and that reality is the headship of Christ expressed through all the body so that the body is growing in a way that it describes at the end of verse 19 when it says that it is a growth which comes from God that is Christ is the head are being incorporated by grace into the body of Christ and growing with the growth that comes from God's nurturing us and God's teaching us and God's leading us and God's directing us and that that growth takes place as that happens and that what and that a church can't go back into the shadows and we're there were to be this is

Palm Sunday and in a sense the Palm Sunday is a celebration of the appearance of things that Palm Sunday is just a shadow of Easter Sunday and everybody greets Palm Sunday with great shouts and welcome and hallelujahs as Christ comes to his city but they don't realize what he's come there for they don't realize the reality of what has to take place during the days of that week that's why this whole week is laid aside in the church to try and bring us out of the shadow of our sometimes benevolent optimism to the reality of the cross and having faced that the reality of the resurrection the substance which belongs to Christ now I have a job for you to do turn to page 167 in your green book will you turn to page 171 sorry now this is something that isn't in the prayer book and I'd like you just to look at it because it's a little form a form of a service or a little encounter between people which could be the means of helping someone else or finding a way yourself to come out of the shadow into the reality of the gospel and it's called the reconciliation of a penitent and the way it's done is very simple now I just show you this as a kind of skeletal form you may not want to use this but the form of it may be helpful to you if someone comes to you and says

I would like you as an older brother or sister in Christ to help me deal with the fact of my sin and to help me confess it and having confessed it to know that I am assured of forgiveness now during the week and in preparation for Easter day there needs to be a kind of preparation a kind of coming out of the shadow of our religious life into the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ coming out of the things that obscure the ultimate issues and mostly that obscurity comes from unforgiven sin in our lives so that we're using church to deny the reality of our sinfulness sinfulness we're using church to justify our sinfulness we're using church to hide from our sinfulness but what we're supposed to use church for is to confess and be forgiven to put it away so that it's remembered no more so the confession of our sins becomes very important and you will be instructed by the prayer book that you can do that as in the order of confession that we've all gone through this morning we've made our confession and received the words of absolution but that may not be enough and some of you may not believe that the sins which you've committed are capable of being forgiven and this is to assure you that they are and they are not because they're not bad in themselves because indeed they may be they may be much worse or not as bad as you may think they are but they are there and you need to deal with them and so how do you deal with them well where you read priest in this just put your own name because you can you know you can be a priest to another person an elder to another person and thereby help them through this and you may want to seek another person to help you through it so that one says to the other bless the

Lord who forgives all sins and the penitent is reminded as he says or she says his mercy endures forever and then the elder may say may God who enlightens every heart help you to confess your sins and to trust in his mercy and then there's a form within which somebody can confess their sins now this is a formal way of doing it but you can use the formal and the informal together as you may explain something that is very much on your mind and heart and which stands in the way of you coming from the shadow to the substance from the copy to the reality to the original becoming God's masterpiece God's work of art and you say in confession most merciful

God have mercy upon me in your compassion forgive my sins known and unknown things done and left undone and especially where you may want to mention the thing that you have done specifically for which you cannot believe God could forgive you and confessing that say oh God uphold me by your spirit that I may live and serve you in newness of life to the honor and glory of your name and then it gives something that a priest may use or a lay person may use but it's they're both basically the same thing you look at the bottom one it says Lord Jesus Christ who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to the father forgive our sins because it's two sinners that are kneeling before God grant us the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit and then blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are put away and the elder says not on the basis of being a psychologist but on the basis of knowing the promises of

[20 : 39] God he says to you or to me as penitent the Lord has put away all your sins to which you can say in faith thanks be to God and the elder says go in peace and pray for me a sinner that's a lovely form by which we can help one another and by which we can encourage one another and if that doesn't work for you for some reason then you may need more help but at least you've made a try and at least you've prepared yourself not to come to church on Easter Sunday as one who hasn't sinned or as one who successfully deceived himself or herself but as one who has acknowledged and confessed their sins and has come up against the reality of the grace of God in the forgiveness of sins and so

I want you to use the weak in this way in your life I mean our whole culture teaches us to avoid this point but Christ says that's what the church does consistently it did it in Colossi and no doubt it can do it here that we move away from the substance to the shadow we move away from the original to the copy we're just a copycat Christian and so I just commend that to you that that for all of us as a congregation we might know what it is to be the body of Christ not out of touch with or having lost connection with the head and being the means by which other people can come into touch with the reality of the gospel that as a congregation we may grow as God causes us to in the grace and mercy of our God well it's a it's an important thing to do to cut through all the shadowy insubstantial business of religion to the wonder of the heart of the gospel as it is presented to us as we annually remember in this holy week the trial and death of Jesus

Christ his burial and his resurrection amen amen adding