

Podcast Episode 78: Authentic Christianity, Part 2

This is the final part of a special series entitled “Authentic Christianity”, in which Denver addresses the questions: What is Authentic Christianity? How does it differ from Historic or Modern Christianity? Why are there so many divisions between denominations? What is God up to today regarding Christianity?

DENVER: People that have power tend not to be respectful of those that lack power. And if you can treat people as your servants, your slaves, your serfs, then you treat them accordingly. And so, Christianity developed into a monolithic and very abusive control, centered in the Roman clergy, headquartered in Rome. For a whole variety of reasons, including ambitious, local kings who wanted to declare their own independence from the Roman hegemony and who wanted their own ability to waylay the money that was being aggregated through the church and getting exported. They wanted to keep that money locally and get their own hands on it.

A moment came in 1517, when it was possible for Martin Luther, pricked as he was in his conscience, because he believed what Paul had written. He believed what Matthew, Mark, and Luke had recorded. He believed in the faith. And he saw that what was acting itself out on the stage of life bore no resemblance to the lofty perfection that is spoken of in the teachings of the New Testament. He simply had had enough, but his life was spared because politically there was a political leader who saw some advantage in providing protection to Martin Luther. And so, Martin Luther was spared from what had happened to others who had rebelled against Rome. He wasn't burned at the stake. He was instead allowed to post his disagreement. And ultimately found a new brand of Christianity, in which he believed it would be more authentically Christian, and less inauthentically autocratic and authoritarian. But just like what happened in the New Testament with the 12 apostles, immediately upon the emergence of Lutheranism, we get in the same generation—these people met and spoke with one another—John Knox, John Calvin, Zwingli, Martin Luther.

Not only did the fracturing of Roman hegemony cause Protestantism, but Protestantism immediately began to say, We disagree with you about...(choose your topic), and you have multiple Protestant denominations immediately springing into existence. And what had been coercive unity through Roman dictatorship and artificial unification of Christianity for a millennium and a half, immediately upon the first fissure showing up, you have fracture after fracture and disunity after disunity, because Christianity simply disagreed about so many things. And it was inconceivable, inconceivable to them that Christianity did not require you to divide up into mutually exclusive camps in which your brand of Christianity ought to be, at least claimed to be, superior to their brand of Christianity. And if heaven is only for those who have the truest form of Christianity, then those people really need to go to hell, because they aren't quite Christian enough in the truest way, in the most meaningful way, in the most correct way.

So, let's go back and read that verse again: *That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in **one** all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, in Him* (Ephesians 1:10, emphasis added; see also Ephesians 1:1 RE). All things. I don't know how many of you sitting here today hearing those who have spoken about Buddhism, or speaking about the Native American tradition, or speaking about Messianic Judaism, I don't know how many of you sitting here today have thought, That speaker has said something true, and I believe that. Whether you think that may be part of Christianity or the teachings of Christ or not, when you hear truth—The dispensation of the fulness of times, which has to occur before the return of the Lord, has to gather together in one *all things*. If that thing to be gathered has been fractured and lost to Christianity, but preserved in Hinduism; if that thing to be gathered is a truth lost to Christianity, broken away and preserved in Buddhism; if that thing to be gathered into one appears anywhere, then in the dispensation of the fulness of times, it all must be brought back and gathered into one.

If you take a piece of art, sculpture, and you fracture the sculpture into bits, and then you gather the bits and you reassemble them, you will not have the unity and the perfection of the original until every piece has been found, every piece has been gathered, and every piece has been put into its proper perspective. Only when they've all been gathered, and only when they've all been put in their proper place—because the sculpture ought not look like Picasso and the Cubists. It ought to look like what it was when originally formed. When that happens, so that you can now see the beauty that's there, then you've completed the gathering. But the prediction is that it will be gathered together in **one**—in Christ, so it doesn't matter if you're a Hindu, and you think Christ is outside—he is other than our tradition. Your tradition must be gathered home also into Christ, because it fits there. And if you're Buddhist and you say, 'Ours is not a religion, but a philosophy, a way of thinking, a way of disciplining the mind,' that way of thinking, that way of disciplining the mind, likewise must be gathered together in Christ for it to find its home. Because the purpose is the salvation and eternal life of every being, of every person. Until we gather all the parts, it is not possible to gather in one, all things that belong with Christ. The search must be global, the search and the invitation must cross cultures, traditions, religions.

You see, the philosophy that motivated Constantine in coercing Christian unity was the desire to see Christians not fight with one another. If you say fighting with one another is the evil end to be avoided, there are really only two ways to approach conquering that evil end to be avoided. One of them is to do what Constantine and the Popes have attempted and what some other centrally-controlled religious organizations, likewise attempt today; and that is by coercion and exclusion and punishment to discipline the adherents, so that they fall in line. That is a compressive, coercive, and dictatorial way of trying to achieve the Christian unity that we seek after.

Another more benign way of attempting exactly the same thing is to say, 'You are free in all your thinking, in all your beliefs. We require very little of you. We believe in the Doctrine of Christ, which was read to us here today. It's very short. Belief in Christ, belief in His Father, acceptance of the Holy Ghost, being baptized in faith, and then allowing that Holy Spirit,

that Holy Ghost, to animate you in your search for truth.' And if we begin with diversity, then we begin with appreciation for that diversity, because coming together in the unity that Paul speaks of, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, is not because someone beat you into submission. It's because someone had something to say that resonated as truth to you in such a compelling way that you found yourself persuaded. You found yourself enticed to accept it, you found yourself prizing it, and you welcomed it, and you embraced it. And if someone has not yet embraced it, you explain to them why it's delicious to you. And if they reject it for a season, that's okay too.

There's a revelation that talks about how there are those people who will not taste death, because it shall be sweet unto them. Why do they not taste death? Because death means bitterness. And if, in the authentic Christian's life, the final moments that they spend here are caught up with the testimony of Jesus confirming that they have part with Him in his Kingdom, like Stephen in the very act of being stoned to death, they part this life rejoicing, because whatever they're going through, it doesn't matter. It's joyful to be reunited with that person who represents perfection itself.

The highest aspirations, the highest ideals of Buddhism are present in the Gospel of Christ. The highest ideals of Hinduism are present in the Gospel of Christ. The problem is that in that disunity, in the fracturing, some of the bits of the sculpture that left Christian awareness and departed into the East but were retained by the Hindus, are understood by them, are practiced and accepted by them, but they're outside of the typical Christian awareness. You will not understand the sayings of Jesus the same, if you could put on Hindu eyes for a moment and read what is in the sayings and the teachings of Jesus Christ and of His followers. You'll not understand the teachings of Christ as well, until you've put on Buddhist eyes and you've relooked at the gospel of Christ through that prism, because part of the picture will be missing. Christianity may be disciplined and have its story down. But it lacks the depth, the richness, the kindness, the texture. It lacks the meditative power that you find in Buddhism and Hinduism. As you heard from the people practicing those philosophies, religions, viewpoints today, the fact is that they're fractured too. Part of reunifying everything in Christ is going to reunify the Hindu world as well, reunify the Buddhist world as well.

The title that my talk was given is "What is God up to Today?" He's up to the work and the challenge of reunifying all things in one, in Christ; not by exclusion, and subtraction, and coercion, but by openness, and by addition, and by tolerance.

Jesus Christ had a group of witnesses in a single generation—in a single generation—this isn't a work of fiction. You have four different gospel accounts that come into being in a single generation of time, in which they all agree on the massive truth that this was the Son of God, who came into the world to be the sacrificial lamb, who died—he was rejected and died, and he was resurrected and ascended into heaven. All four of them agree on that. And yet, only Matthew has the sermon on the mount. Some of them mention feeding five thousand, some of them mention feeding seven thousand, and some of them mention both. But not all of them mention everything. There are differences. It's what you would expect if

you're dealing with an authentic account of a real person, that lived a real life, and left behind people who were so astonished by what they witnessed from this man that they wrote accounts; and whereas before, they were cowering, and they were running, and they were denying that they knew that man. After his resurrection and they witnessed that, they went forth boldly and proclaimed who he was, performing miracles themselves, based upon the name of Jesus Christ. Something actually happened. And that something was the life of Jesus Christ. And these men went willingly; whereas before they ran and hid, after his resurrection, after they became acquainted with him, they went willingly to their deaths as witnesses of him.

So, I believed that there was something authentic about Christianity. I just wasn't quite sure about the brand of Christianity that my mom, a Baptist, was teaching me in my youth. I also, going down to the Catholic Church, was skeptical—Pope John VI was the Pope back then—seemed like a decent enough chap. The first Catholic Pope that impressed me was Pope John Paul I. That guy was—he was a fan of Mark Twains, ok? Pope John Paul I was the greatest pope that ever lived as far as I'm concerned. I thought there was something missing from the Baptist faith. I thought there was something theatrical and hollow, even inauthentic about what I saw in Catholicism. Not because the pageantry wasn't depicting something noble, and great, and wonderful, but because the players weren't always up to the job of carrying off the pageantry. There were times when it appeared to me that the last thing the priest in Mountain Home, Idaho was interested in was celebrating the service—the mass. He did it anyway, and it was lifeless. His heart wasn't in it. And so, it seemed to me hard for that to drive religious conviction, if the heart of the priest is not in the celebration of the mass. The Baptists were always into the celebration of what they do, because it's based upon a sort of charismatic movement in which enthusiasm is an expected part of it. But I remember the pious gestures, the things from the pageantry of Catholicism, that depicted things—that depicted holiness, and I believe there is holiness. I honestly believe there to be holiness. But I think it is hard to imitate it instead of authentically be it. That's why a "Mother Theresa" stands out as a global figure, because she didn't imitate it. And Mother Theresa stands as evidence that there is such a thing as Catholic holiness.

Another one that stands out in history, as an authentic evidence of Catholicism having holiness, is St. Francis. St. Francis believed and accepted the sermon on the mount. He lived the sermon on the mount. He went to Rome to get an order commissioned by the pope, and the pope laughed at him and said, 'You can't get anyone to live the sermon on the mount.' He said, 'I would give you an order if you could come back here and bring with you twelve men who would be willing to live the sermon on the mount.' St. Francis was the guy that if you saw him in the cold in winter and you gave him a coat, he would wear that coat until he ran into someone that had a greater need than he, and then he would give away his coat to a person in need. When he decided that he was going to become a priest, his father who was a wealthy man, went and intervened and said, 'You can't do this. Everything about you I paid for! You are utterly dependent upon me, and I refuse to let you go do this.' St. Francis took off all his clothes, handed it to his father, and came to the clergy a poor and naked man, literally. He was a devout man. When he came back to the pope with twelve believers,

the Franciscans were commissioned, and the Order of the Franciscans came into being. The current pope is named after St. Francis. I think St. Francis was an authentic Christian.

In the last two months of St. Francis' life, he reported that angels were visiting with him. There are a lot of people that dismiss that end-of-life spiritual experience, and telling tales of angels and visits, and such things as, you know, the frailties of a dying body. I don't think so in the case of St. Francis. I think that he was ministered to by angels.

There's an expression—it's found in places some of you would find dubious, but there's an expression about how some people do not taste death. The statement that they do not taste death doesn't mean they don't die. It just means that their death is sweet, because they die in companionship with those on the other side, who bring them through that veil of death in a joyful experience. There are a handful of people who have reported that as they were dying, angels came and ministered to them. I think all authentic Christians, in any age, belonging to any denomination—I don't care what the denomination is—I think all authentic Christians who depart this world find that death is sweet to them, and that they are in the company of angels as they leave this world. And I don't think it matters that the brand that you swore allegiance to, and you contributed your resources to support, matter anywhere near as much as whether you believe in Christ, whether you accept the notions that he advances about the sermon on the mount, and whether you try to incorporate and live them in your life.

Jesus took the law of Moses as the standard. What the sermon on the mount does is say, Here is the standard, but your conduct should not be merely *this*. Thou shalt not kill is not enough. You must avoid being angry with your brother. You must forgive those who offend you. You must pray for those who spitefully use you. Just refraining from murdering one another, with a reluctant heart, bearing malice at them, Well I didn't kill the guy, but I got even! That's not enough. That's not the standard that Christ is advancing. Thou shalt not commit adultery is not good enough. Don't look upon a woman to lust after her in your heart. Jesus is saying, Here's the law, and you can do all of those things and be malevolent. You can be angry. You can be bitter. You can be contemptible. You can hold each other out as objects of ridicule. Its purpose is to make you something more lovely, more wonderful, more kindly, more Christian.

Christ says, to be like him. The sermon on the mount is an explanation of what it's like to be like him. St. Francis made the effort of trying that, of doing that. I suspect that the first time St. Francis gave away a coat in the middle of winter to someone else, that it pained him; he probably felt the biting sting of the cold and thought, How wise is this that I'm doing? Because it's always hard to accept a higher standard and to implement it for the first time. But I suspect by the hundredth time he'd done that, he didn't feel the cold anymore; he felt the warmth in his heart of having relieved the suffering of another person. Because the practice of Christian faith involves the development of Christian skill and the development of Christian charity in a way that changes you. You don't remain the same character that you were when you began the journey. You become someone absolutely and fundamentally different.

So, while I was in the Air Force away from home, I was attending a University of New Hampshire night class, some kind of organizational behavior class. Having grown up in Idaho I knew what Mormons were, and this professor, Cal Colby—he's from Brandeis University, but he was teaching a night class for the University of New Hampshire—just gratuitously started attacking Mormons. And my honest reaction was, What the hell are you talking about Mormons in New Hampshire for? That's a local infestation somewhere out in the West, and there's no—there's none of that going on here. And in the middle of his diatribe a guy raised his hand, Colby called on him, and a fellow named Steve Klaproth defended—because he was a Mormon, defended Mormons. I made the mistake afterwards of saying to the fellow—I didn't know his name at the time, but I know him now—Steve, "Good job." I always hate it when a person in a position of strength picks on someone in a position of weakness, and so I went to the guy that was weak and said, you know, good job. He mistook this for interest in his religion. And I wound up, trying to be polite, I wound up being hounded—literally pamphleteered—missionaries coming. It was gosh awful.

Well, I left New Hampshire on what's called Operation Bootstrap, where they send you to college. I went to Boise State University. The Air Force paid for me to go to school. I came back. When I came back there was this camp out; the camp out was at the birthplace of Joseph Smith in Sharon, Vermont. And I went to the camp out. There was a book that was in the Visitor's Center, and they gave me a copy of that book for free. Steve says, "You should read this." I read that. And at that moment I was surprised, because my reaction to Mormonism had been very, very negative, but the ideals that were expressed in this one statement were lofty and noble, and Christian, and charitable, and I wanted to know, where did this come from? It was something that Joseph Smith had written; a revelation that Joseph Smith had received.

Well, I got baptized for the first time in my life on September the 10th of 1973, into the Mormon church. I was a Mormon until September the 10th of 2013, forty years to the day. And on the 40th anniversary of becoming a Mormon, I was excommunicated from the Mormon church. So, I don't say this to sound like I'm bragging or exaggerating, but I do not know anyone alive today that knows as much about Mormon history as I do. Because while I was part of that, and then afterwards, still, I've read every historical document that I can get my hands on. I've read everything that Joseph Smith said that got recorded, wrote, or transcribed when he had a scribe writing for him. My understanding of Mormon history is encyclopedic.

There's a thing that goes on in Salt Lake City called the Sunstone Symposium. It's run by people who are basically renegade Mormons, intellectuals, and it started out being friendly to the Mormon church, it grew into outright hostility and anger towards the Mormon church, and then it converted into a mixed bag. And some of it is pro, and some of it is con. And I've spoken at the Sunstone Symposium. One of the things I've presented was a paper about Brigham Young, in which Brigham Young's megalomaniacal presiding over Mormonism, during the late 1840s into the early 1850s, and the excesses that went on during that time period, including murders that occurred on Brigham Young's watch, were

laid out. Sunstone asked the Dean of Mormon History, the guy that is most respected, Thomas Alexander, to respond to my paper. And Thomas Alexander came and responded to my paper. I was talking about Brigham Young's literal regarding of himself as an actual king from the time they got out of the valley in 1847, until the time he was deposed by the Army of the United States as the territorial governor in 1857. I was talking about that period of time. Thomas Alexander got up and said, No, Brigham Young didn't believe those things, because he said things in 1860 and in 1870, and he read the quotes from 1860 and 1870. Well, as soon as he was deposed as governor, he *knew* he wasn't king. All 1860 and 1870 have to contribute is the fact that Brigham Young ultimately managed to grapple with reality because he had been deposed. But what he was saying in that early time period is exactly what he meant. So, after Thomas Alexander got through with his rebuttal paper, I got up and for five minutes dismantled the Dean of Mormon History's view.

The Mormon church is a cult. It is not an authentic Christian organization. But I believe that you can find Christians who are Mormons. I believe that you can find Christians in every denomination that are out there. I believe that there is an authenticity to belief in Christ that transcends every denomination that's out there. I wrote books about the history of Mormonism that expose many of the things that the Mormon church represents to be true; I show to be false, including their authority claims, including their consistent following of what the founder of Mormonism stood for, believed in, and practiced himself. Joseph Smith raised the largest army. The largest standing army in the United States in 1844 was under the command of Major General Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois. Literally, he could have taken on the United States Army and defeated them. And do you know what Joseph Smith did with a standing army larger than anyone else in the United States—larger than the Federal Government, larger than any of the state militias—do you know what he did? He disarmed his soldiers, he turned the cannons over to the state of Illinois, he surrendered to the governor of the state of Illinois, and three days later he was murdered while he was in jail. He would rather personally die or give up his life, than to have people on both sides of a fight die as a consequence of a religious dispute.

In 1837, Joseph Smith was in Missouri, and while he was in Missouri hostilities broke out between Mormons and Missourians. Part of the problem with the hostilities was that leaders around Joseph Smith were spoiling for a fight. Literally, spoiling for a fight. Guy named Sidney Rigdon, who was a counselor to Joseph Smith, gave a speech in which he said, If you people show any more aggression towards us, we're going to wage a war of extermination, and we will wipe all you Missourians out. It's called the salt speech; it was delivered on July the fourth of that year. It's an incendiary talk.

There was a Mormon named Sampson Avard, who went about provoking hostilities with the Missourians. Sampson Avard was a Mormon and he had a group that he called the Danites, based upon the tribe of Dan. The blessing that was given to Dan in the 49th chapter of Genesis talks about Dan being an asp in the way that bites the horses. It's a preamble of the violence that the tribe of Dan would render in the posterity of Dan. So, Sampson Avard took the name Danites as his group, and they began to retaliate by burning houses, burning fields, stealing cattle, stealing hogs, bringing them back. Joseph Smith

found out about it and he demoted Samson Avard. He was relieved of all responsibility, and Joseph made him a cook. So, the guy who was the militant leader is now a cook.

Hostilities ultimately did break out. It was inevitable that there be retaliations. Each side were saying that they were the victim and the governor of Missouri said, We're going to wage a war of extermination, quoting what the Mormons had said in that July 4th talk. And so Mormons were expelled from the state of Missouri. The militia was outside Far West Missouri, a town called Far West. Joseph Smith and his family, friends, and Mormons were inside Far West. They had a defensive position from which they literally could have caused so many casualties that the militia could never have overrun the town; the cost in blood would have been too high. Joseph Smith surrendered, and told his people to surrender their arms, and he deflated the tension.

He was taken into custody by the state of Missouri, he was charged with treason against the state for fomenting rebellion. And they had a series of hearings, trying to get witnesses to prove that Joseph Smith should be held for trial on the charge of treason. And no one, no one could prove that Joseph Smith was involved with any of the hostilities, until the guy who actually caused the hostilities, Sampson Avard, came to the courthouse to testify, to blame Joseph Smith for everything he had done. And so Joseph Smith was held over on the charge of treason based upon the testimony of the guy who knew what cattle were stolen, what hogs were stolen, what fields were burned—that he was responsible for—and he simply said all that, that Joseph engineered that. And so, based upon the testimony of traitors, Joseph Smith was held in prison for a period of six months over a—over a winter time period in an unheated dungeon, that had bars but no glass on the windows, and they suffered for six months in a Missouri prison.

He was allowed to escape and get back to his people, all of whom had been driven out of Missouri. But while he was in prison, and while he had the opportunity to think about everything, Joseph Smith composed a letter from Liberty Jail that breathes with the spirit of Christian compassion, forgiveness, love, kindness, and refraining from abusing others. This is a man who got betrayed by his friends, and he turns around and shows for his friends, compassion. One of the books that I've written is called *A Man Without Doubt*. In it I set up the historical context out of which Joseph Smith produced the three longest writings of his own, in his life. It's a letter from Liberty Jail; it's Lectures on Faith; and it's a statement of his own history—because the church historian had stolen all the manuscripts. Time and time again the worst enemies of Joseph Smith were Mormons, people that claimed to follow the religion that he was developing. Joseph Smith in my view is authentically Christian, the same way as Saint Francis is authentically Christian. The problem is—and it is an enormous problem—the problem is that everyone outside of the Mormon world looks at him as the property of the LDS Church. They look at him as if he were accurately represented by a group of people that time and time again, he condemned, and time and time again, betrayed him. *A Man Without Doubt* is an attempt to let people see Joseph Smith as a Christian divorced from the LDS Church, or any of the splinter Mormon groups. And to see him, potentially, as an authentic Christian in the same way that I think Martin Luther and John

Wesley; even John Calvin, although Calvin was so militant; he's kind of a drum beater that scares me a little, nevertheless he was authentically Christian.

I think that everyone who sacrifices for the cause of Christ can help contribute to my understanding of what it means to follow Christ. Because people who follow Christ bear the evidence of that discipleship in the way in which they walk, and the things that they do, and the things that they give up, in how they discipline their heart and how they discipline their mind, in how they treat one another. When you find someone whose life bears evidence that they are authentically Christian because of what they do, they are authentically Christian because of what they say. Christ said, 'It's not what goes into the mouth that proves you're unclean, it's what comes out.' What do you say? How do you display the grace of God in your life? I can tell you one way you don't display the grace of God, and that's by condemning, merely because of their affiliation with one Christian group or another, condemning them, as being inauthentically Christian.

Christ looks upon the inner person. All of his parables, all of his parables suggest there's something very different about authenticity and inauthenticity. There are 10 virgins. Well, what are virgins a symbol of? If Christ is using the virgin as a symbol, he's talking about good people. These are, these are good religious people; they have to be. And of that group, only five were allowed in. There's a wedding feast and at the wedding feast he invites friends and they don't come. Well who are the friends of Christ that are invited to come to his wedding feast? And they don't come. They don't come because their hearts aren't right, their words aren't right, their mind isn't right, they are not authentically what Christ is trying to have us be. But he invites and they don't come, because they will not be His. And so, he goes out on the highways and the byways to try and find anyone that will come. And anyone that will come suggests that, well, they could be a Samaritan. Think about the parable of the Good Samaritan from the perspective of a Jewish audience. They were nothing but apostates, and yet he uses the apostate as the illustration of authentic Christian discipleship. They invite in off the highways and the byways, strangers. People that you don't expect to be invited because they're not at your church every week. They're going to some other place or perhaps no place at all. And yet they're invited in, and they're allowed to remain, so long as they have on the wedding garment. In other words, if they come having donned the mantle of authentic Christianity, they're welcome, they're welcomed. We care and we fight about religious issues that are of no moment at all to Christ. And we do that because we're paying clergymen every week to rile us up so that we'll stay loyal to them and their congregation. And we'll contribute and we will view one another with fear and non-acceptance.

You take the money out of Christianity; most ministers would go into politics. They would not hang around. I'm not lying. They have done polls of Christian ministers, to ask them if they believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who was resurrected. The majority of Christian ministers do not have faith; what they have is a career. And they can't abandon their career. 'If I leave your employ, what's going to become of me? Because I'll be a poor man.' And so they stay employed preaching what they don't believe. It's one of the reasons why I think Father Ordway, in Mountain Home, Idaho, made the gestures and his countenance was

devoid of the holiness that should be expressed, of the joy that should be expressed. I saw that in my friend Rick's mother, Mary. I saw in her that, that fire of belief, that devotion. I didn't see it in Father Ordway.

Well, I'm trying to get people to consider the possibility that authentic Christians could come from anywhere, among any people. And that we can fellowship with one another. And that it is even possible to fellowship with one another, even independent of an employee-hireling priest, in which we study together; we worship together; we rejoice in Christ together; we try to figure out how to be more authentically Christian in what we do, and what we say, and how we treat one another, and how we view one another.

And then to take the next step and to contribute our tithes and our offerings to a group of believers, to help believers, to help each other. So that it's not just the support of the clergy and the support of the buildings, the support of the programs, but it's also helping the fatherless and helping the mother who has no one to help her. And to have Christianity, not just theoretically modeled in feel-good sermons, but actively part of life and part of how we deal with and treat one another; in which we all say, 'We've all sinned. We've all fallen short of the glory of God, but let's not let that cause me to condemn you. Let's not let that stop me from trying, in as authentic a way as I can, to be charitable and kind to you, and you to me, and us to the people in need among us.' Because if they were ever an authentic group of people who are Christian, who were helping one another, the appeal of that would cause everyone who comes into their midst to have a change of heart. They'd want to be part of that, they'd want to live that kind of life. Because there's no better life than the one that Christ taught us to model in the sermon on the mount.

Anyway, I've talked for an hour and my experience teaches me that when you've had people sitting and listening to you for an hour, you're a wicked and despicable man if you make them sit and listen to you any longer. So, unless there's anything that someone wants to talk about, ask about—I really do know a lot about Mormon history and it's, it's not at all what the Mormon persona is represented to be, either by the church itself or by its critics. In some ways its history is much worse than the critics tell you. And in some ways, the very beginning of it was much different and much better than what they represent.

I believe Brigham Young introduced the practice of plural wives. I believe that Joseph Smith was an ardent opponent of that. I believe that Joseph Smith has been falsely portrayed because Brigham Young didn't think he could bring that into the practice unless he laid it at the feet of Joseph Smith. And I think there's been a lot of history in Mormonism that tries to lay at the feet of Joseph Smith responsibility for the things that traitors and treacherous and evil men did. And escape responsibility for it by saying, 'Joseph taught it. Oh, he taught it in private. Oh, he lied to the public. He lied to the public about it, but in private he practiced it and he taught it.' And I have to tell you, Joseph Smith was not that kind of man. I read the letters between Joseph Smith and his wife Emma. Emma was a stronger personality than Joseph. Emma was his trusted counselor and guide. Joseph deferred to her, he took advice from her, he took counsel from her, she was better educated than him. The stories that have been attributed to Joseph Smith—you should read *A Man Without Doubt*.

You should go back and reconsider whether what you think Joseph was, is it all supportable by a true telling of history? Because I don't think it is, and that's one of the reasons why I'm an excommunicated Mormon, because—because I think the truth is valuable and it's worth searching out.

Let me end by saying that I do believe in the potential for the unity of Christians coming together in one faith. I suspect that sitting here in this room, if every one of you were asked, 'Are you a Christian?', every one of you would respond, 'Yes.' And I suspect, if I asked you to explain what denomination you were, that probably every one but you would tell you what's wrong with your particular version of Christianity. I don't think the measure of your Christianity is determined by whether or not I want to judge, condemn, dismiss, belittle, complain about your version. The authenticity of your Christianity is reckoned in your heart and in your relationship with God, and if that's authentic and if that's sincere, how dare anyone question that? If I think I know more than you and I have a better view of Jesus Christ and his atonement than do you, then I ought to assume the burden of persuading you. I ought to meekly tell you why you ought to have greater faith in something else; but to demand, and to insist, and to belittle, and to complain—quite frankly that's exactly where early Christianity wound up when Christians were killing Christians because of doctrinal disputes. What kind of nonsense is that? Let's not go there. Let's accept one another as Christians, if any one of us says that they are a Christian, and then if you think you can improve their understanding, have at it, but let's not dismiss, belittle, or discard.

We believe we are approaching a moment in which the Lord is about to return. Read that chapter, Matthew 24. All of the signs that He speaks of will occur in one single generation. If you've not noticed, the signs have begun to appear. It means you are living within a generation in which a great deal is to occur. As it was in the days of Noah so is it about to be. That means dreadful things are coming on the one hand, and it means prophets are going to be among us again—people with messages that come from the Lord.

I'm not here on my own volition. I've not done anything that I've done, throughout the last number of years, on my own volition. I do what I do, I preach what I preach, I testify to what I testify to because, like Paul, I've been sent.

I would rather understate than overstate the case, but let me end by telling you—Christ lives! He died and He was resurrected. I know this to be true because, like Paul, I have seen Him. I don't tell you that to make this seem sensational. I tell you that to give you cause to believe in Him. He is real.

Encountering Him as a resurrected being changed the course of history. It turned cowards into courageous, willing, and enthusiastic witnesses, who faced down the Roman empire to their death. They died willingly. They died as evidence of the truth, that they were testifying to. That kind of faith needs to return again to the earth. That kind of faith is possible again in our day.

Christianity has taken so many turns and so many different forms from the death of the apostles until now. But however you may regard yourself to be a Christian, what every one of us needs is for Heaven itself to reaffirm to us what it is that Heaven would like us, as Christians, to be and to do.

I mention that Christ gave many commandments, precepts, teachings. He also gave a law. His law can be found in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7. That is how you and I should practice our Christianity.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from:

- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #7, given in Boise, Idaho on November 3, 2018;
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #8, given in Montgomery, Alabama on May 18, 2019;
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #2, given in Dallas, TX on October 19th, 2017; and
- Denver's *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #1, given in Cerritos, CA on September 21st, 2017.

Today's podcast addresses important questions about authentic Christianity, but is only an introduction to ideas that listeners of any denomination may find important and relevant. These topics are more fully addressed in Denver's Eight talks addressed to all Christians of every denomination, which are available to watch, listen or download for free at christianreformation500years.info.