



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Avoiding the Traps of Inauthentic Faith – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Jed Coppenger

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Gary Bauer: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Question for you. How do you know if your faith is the real thing or just a comfortable imitation? That's the question that a lot of people have been asking recently, and it's also at the heart of our conversation this week here on Family Talk. Gary Bauer, our senior vice president of public policy here at the Dr. James Dobson Policy and Culture Center, sat down with Dr. Jed Coppenger, lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Cumming, Georgia, to talk about 10 traps of an inauthentic faith and how to avoid them. He's written about them in his new book called *Fake Christianity*. On the last edition of Family Talk, Dr. Coppenger walked us through Jesus' words in Matthew 23, revealing how easy it is to slip from a servant's heart into a performer's mentality, doing good things, but for the wrong reasons.

On today's edition of Family Talk, Dr. Coppenger takes us a little deeper, exploring how fake faith plays games with the truth and why even the most painful chapters of our past can ultimately become powerful tools in God's hands. So here now is Gary Bauer to continue this conversation on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Gary Bauer: I confess that over the years I've been in public life that you can get hooked on giving a speech to a crowd and see as a result of your words that some people, if it's a sad moment, are literally crying or you've brought joy and some people are laughing and applauding and it can become its own drug where that affirmation becomes what you're looking for in your message instead of just speaking the truth.

Dr. Jed Coppenger: You're exactly right. Yeah. They can be good little signposts. I mean, when you're preaching or you're speaking, you get a sense, is the crowd with me? Are they not with me? Well, that's good. That's a God-given ability to read and to do those things. Where it gets us in trouble is where that good ability that's given from God turns it to a kind of idol that really is the heart motivation. And a lot of times we need God's help to help us to see that. And so we can pray, God, would you help me see and would you help purify my motives? Jesus is able to see it to their hearts, to see them to their very depths. And He says to them, "You're motivated by the wrong things." And so I think just asking that question

every once in a while is a good discipline to help us, whether it's parenting or it's just going to our job or it's serving a church or any number of things.

Ask ourselves, are we doing it for the right reasons? Are we motivated by the things that Jesus wants us to be motivated by or do we need to make an adjustment there? I've found that an un-hurried time with an open Bible and some kind of journal thing. If you have that kind of thing, you'd be amazed how often God will reveal to you that you're on the right track or you're off the right track.

Gary Bauer: I mean, it's the owner manual of our faith, right? I don't know how people think they can continue to run their faith the right way if they don't ever consult the owner's manual.

Dr. Jed Coppenger: You got that right. Listen, you do. And the thing that's so tricky about it is, is that the people that Jesus is talking to, a lot of them had Old Testament books memorized. Some of those scribes and those Pharisees, these were Bible people.

Gary Bauer: Yes.

Dr. Jed Coppenger: But they somehow in their reading of the Bible, they were not following ... It didn't lead them to the God of the Bible and they were missing Him standing right before them. And I don't think that should ... I don't want that to discourage us too much, but I also do think it should sober us that we need to have the Bible open. We need to read it with the people of God and we need to fight to have our hearts sensitive to the leading of the Scriptures and not try to fit the Scriptures into an American version of Christianity where we do the things that are kind of popular at the moment and we don't do the things that aren't popular at the moment and turn the Bible into a salad bar, but that we need to have a whatever you say, Lord, your servant is here kind of attitude so that we don't fall into the same trap that those guys did.

Gary Bauer: You touch on this theme in a lot of different places in the book, but at one point you addressed the fact that we can have people in church who are filled with passion, but their passion is headed in the wrong direction. They're not going where our faith requires us to go. And the story you relate begins with, I believe, an 18th century theologian who sort of fell away from the faith of his father who was a chaplain. But this gentleman did not leave the church completely. He stayed in the church and he started watering down Christianity to make it more acceptable to the popular culture and to the universities of that day. And as I was reading that, it sounded like exactly what's happening today in a really dramatic way. I mean, when we see people hanging flags outside of churches for causes that it's very hard to find a biblical basis for. So could you address that? Because I think this might be one of the great temptations, particularly a lot of progressive churches are falling into.

Dr. Jed Coppenger:

I think you're exactly right. It's a challenge in every generation, and it certainly is in ours today. The theologian you were referencing is actually called the Father of Modern Liberal Theology, Frederick Schleiermacher. And he has a famous book called *Speeches to Its Culture Despisers*. And his passion to try to make Christianity helpful to the world around him at the time, he watered down the message and in a way that he thought would make it more acceptable to the world around him. But in the process, he lost the thing that he was trying to reach them with. And so his good passion to try to reach people led him to use the Word of God in a way that led people away from the God of the Word. And you see this over and over. I think many people remember a guy named Rob Bell who pastored a massive church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

And over time in his desire to reach people, he started to remove certain parts of the Bible that were incredibly important. One of the most infamous books that he wrote was a book called *Love Wins*. It was a book about Heaven, Hell, and the fate of everyone who ever lived. And in it, he essentially says, "Hell doesn't exist." Well, of course, if Hell doesn't exist, then that means Jesus was wrong. And what he said, it means He went to the cross for nothing, which is a pretty big mistake. And the missionary work that's happening all around the world really is a waste of time. I mean, why be separated from your family? I've got family overseas. Why should we be separated if there's really nothing to be scared of in terms of this thing? And of course, he has walked away from the faith, but it's another example of someone who's really passionate about a good thing, reaching people, and that's a good thing, but he loses the truth of the gospel and walks people away from the God of the gospel.

And you see that today where people will use words from Scripture like love, unity, these kinds of things, but they actually fill them with different language and meaning that lead people away from the biblical meaning of the Word. So they'll use words from the Bible to lead people away from the God of the Bible. And so we have to be on guard as people try to use the parts of Scripture that they find convenient to them to do exactly what we see Satan trying to do with Jesus in Matthew 4, where he uses the Bible, quotes the Bible to Jesus to try to get Jesus to walk away from the Bible. He doesn't come in there and say, "Hey, listen, you ought to worship Satan and reject God." He misinterprets Bible. He distorts the meaning of Scripture in a way to try to lead Jesus away from obedience to Scripture. Jesus understands what's going on there and He's able to avoid it. We need to be on guard for the same thing in our day.

Gary Bauer:

Dr. Coppenger, the point you're making is so central. The studies that are out there by Barna and others show, I don't remember the exact figure, but show an astonishing percentage of self-professing Christians do not believe there's a Hell. I mean, that is so fundamental. It really is, I think, a sign of how far off the tracks we're going. I think quite frankly, a lot of young Christians can be tempted into this, just this idea that our faith is only love, that God is only a loving God, and that there's no need to live in any particular way because there's always cheap grace out there that will forgive whatever you do.

Dr. Jed Coppenger: You're exactly right. It is a sobering challenge that's before us that people would think that because it's no mistake that as we see people downplay some of those truths of the Bible, we also see people experience less and less of the joy of the Bible because all those things are connected. If you reduce the great work that Jesus has done on the cross for us, you're going to end up reducing the experience of joy in Heaven that He has for us. You'll take it for granted. You won't see the cost, but Jesus shows us His love for us by laying down His life for us, He says. And so when we try to redefine Christianity, by using words from Christianity, it will always lead to lostness and despair. Jesus is calling us to double our commitment to His Word, to being people of the book, to be people of His word, that we don't just have the Bible on the shelf in our home, but we have it at the center of our family life where we're talking about it when we're encouraging one another in it, where we're going to a church that preaches us, that we're doing whatever it takes to make sure our lives are aligned with the Word of God so that us and our kids and those that we have influence with are able to pick up on the fake thing when the enemy brings it our way.

Gary Bauer: As Christians, obviously we're supposed to be optimistic because we know how the story ultimately ends, but that doesn't tell us what's going to happen in America. And I guess I'd like to solicit your opinion. Do you see signs out there that perhaps a revival could be beginning to percolate? There's some great stories coming off of all places, the university campuses where there are little mini revivals and people being baptized in the fountain in the middle of the campus. And I'm just wondering, as a pastor and writing this wonderful book, are you seeing any signs in Georgia, for example, that something's going on?

Dr. Jed Coppenger: Absolutely. In every generation, the devil overplays his hand. And I think he's done that here recently and you're seeing more and more young men and young women who are seeing that there's nothing in the world that will satisfy their hearts and are coming to Christ and giving their lives to him. You're seeing this all over the place. I mean, you're seeing it at Auburn here recently. There was a massive work that took place at Ohio State University. The Ohio State University, as they'll tell you, there was a movement of God taking place there. And you're hearing this all over the place where God is working amongst the younger generation and it's not in places where the truth of the Bible is being watered down, it's in places where they're being given the real thing, where they're being told the truths that Christians have agreed upon across the generations, across the cultures that Christians have united around.

As those truths have been laid out to them, the spirit of God has used those truths to awaken many. So I'm really encouraged by the work that I'm seeing all over the place. I believe that there's more work to be done. It's an interesting time right now. I know that the devil is always at work. And like you mentioned at the very beginning, he prowls around like a roaring lion and he without question has plans for our kids, for our grandkids, for everyone. And so we need to be intentional, we need to be biblical, and we need to be prayerful if we want to see that work continue and expand in our day. The thing that was so shockingly encouraging to me in Jesus's message there is how at the very end of

His message, after all of these things that He said were so horrible that we need to watch out for, that He said essentially, "Although your sins are many, His mercy is more." There's this gentleness and this mercy that Jesus still has in His eyes when He looks at these who have failed Him.

He wants them to know what John Newton says, which is, although your sins are many, His mercy is more. And the thing that's so encouraging to me about that is it just reminds us that on that Tuesday of Easter week when He's saying these strong words, He's not just there to condemn them. He's saying these things that we need to hear, that they needed to hear, not because He wanted Him to feel really bad. He's telling them these things because He's the good physician. Like any good doctor, you got to start with the proper diagnosis. And then we know in His mind, He's going to the cross on Friday to do everything necessary to purchase the mercy and grace needed for people like them and people like us to be forgiven for our sins, to be clothed in His righteousness, to be filled with His spirit so that we can walk in a new way.

And that's a mercy and grace that doesn't just change our eternity. It also changes our ability to face the challenges He says before us today in our homes, in our hearts, in our church and our work. His mercy isn't just something that changes our relationship with God. It isn't just something that changes our life for eternity, although those are amazing things. It also changes our ability to live transformed today so that although our sins are many, His mercy is more and His mercy is relevant. I really do believe there are listeners that still struggle to believe that His mercy is more. I'll never forget years ago, I had someone standing in the back of our auditorium after a service on a Sunday. It was a young woman. I could tell she was kind of lingering longer. I'd never seen her before, but she wanted to talk.

So I kind of went over and introduced myself to her and she asked if I would pray with her. I said, "Sure, is there anything I can pray with you about?" Well, she opened up about a question that she had. She said, "My boyfriend told me I shouldn't come today and I shouldn't talk to you today. He told me that because of the things that I had done, I was too morally dirty to be forgiven and there wasn't enough mercy for someone like me." And so she told me, "Is that true?" And I had the great privilege of telling her while tears are coming down her face, although her sins and my sins are many, His mercy is more, that Jesus paid it all and all to Him we owe, we know that His payment was accepted because He didn't stay dead. And on the third day He was raised from the grave and He offers salvation to His enemies.

He only offers salvation to the undeserving. So there's plenty of mercy for someone like her. She received that. It was a great day, but my guess there's others today who find themselves in a situation. Maybe it's not exactly like that situation, but they feel stuck. And I just want to encourage them that although whatever they are facing seems impossible to them, we follow the God of the impossible and He loves to do the impossible on behalf of the undeserving and there's good news for people like that. And so that's the key to all of this. We

can't live out authentic Christianity without His help, but with His help, we can do anything.

Gary Bauer:

If you were in front of a audience right now, you would get that acclaim that you said to be careful about because that was so, so well said, doctor. Very well said. One of the things, as you know, Dr. Dobson, we all care very much about the sanctity of life. And a lot of believers have started over the years, these crisis pregnancy centers around the country that just do an incredible job. And a story that I've heard time and time again is that those centers will minister to women who had previously aborted a baby. The good Christians working in those centers will say, "God can forgive you of that. You just have to acknowledge what you've done. His blood was shed for you too." There's a lot of research that shows that in spite of all the talk about an abortion's nothing, it's like getting your appendix taken out, that in fact, women are exploited by abortion and often many of them will struggle their entire lives with the guilt from that choice. So this message of grace and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ, there's nothing more important that the church can say than that.

Dr. Jed Coppenger:

You're exactly right. You saying that reminds me of one of my favorite stories that I've had in pastoral ministry. And it's a great reminder that God is so great that He can use the most painful areas of our past to become our most powerful areas of our ministry. And years ago, I had a woman that wanted to meet with me. I've known her for years and she was involved at our church and she came to me and she said she had an abortion when she was a teenager. She regrets it every day of her life, but she feels like the Lord was leading her to start a ministry to try to help teenage moms, support them so that they might not make the mistake that she made after making other mistakes like she did. And she wondered if we would be willing to help partner with her to minister to teenage moms.

And of course, we were thrilled to. We want to help people wherever they are. And it was just a great reminder that our most painful areas in the past, things we regret, when we place those things in God's hands, not only does He remove the condemnation for those things because there's no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus, He oftentimes will actually enable us to turn what the enemy meant for evil. He's going to turn it for good so that now it's a special passion and we have a special pathway to impact and to plead and to point people in that area to walk in a new way. It really is a thing I think everybody needs a reminder of every once in a while, that no matter what you've done, God really can use you to advance His purposes. Just be available. You don't have to be awesome. We follow an awesome God who can do awesome things with available people.

Gary Bauer:

Pastor, often when I speak at events and folks will come up later and you know how that goes. They want to talk about a lot of different things. And I almost always will ask those individuals, "Well, what do you do? What's your job? What's your profession or whatever?" And it's been heartbreaking to me how often somebody will say, "Oh, Mr. Bauer, I'm just the pastor of a little church

and this town or that town." And it breaks my heart because they really sound like they don't understand. They are the path to Christ for everybody that walks through that door. You're a pastor, you've done very well being a pastor and speaking the truth. Could I ask you to give a word of encouragement to the pastors out there that may think, "Well, I only have 50 people in my congregation on a Sunday. What difference can I make?" Well, you can make a lot of difference.

Dr. Jed Coppenger:

You can make a lot of difference. I'm reminded of, I think it was a puritan who was talking to someone that was in a similar situation and he had that passage in mind in Hebrews 13 that talks about how overseers will give an account for the souls under their care. And he says, "On that day, whenever that is and whatever that looks like," he says, "On that day, most pastors aren't going to be looking for more people. They're going to be looking for less people to give an account for because of the seriousness of the task." But I think one of the great lies of the enemy is to convince people that are doing God's work that it doesn't matter. And I think that's a problem, not just today. I think it's always been a problem. That's why Paul has to say what he says in 1 Corinthians 15:58 when he says that your work in the Lord is not in vain.

And the reason he has to say that is because sometimes it feels like it's in vain. I don't care what the size of your church or your ministry is. All of us find ourselves in moments where we ask the question, "Is this making any difference?" If my one life that God's given me, is this really making any difference? And the consistent testimony over and over again of Scripture is yes. When you do your work heartedly unto the Lord, like Colossians 3 says, "When you're placing your offering, whether it's a small little offering, it's just the mite kind of a deal or whatever it is, when you place it in his hands, it changes everything. Listen, you place a baseball or a basketball in my hand. I can't do much with it, but if you place a basketball in LeBron James hands, he can do some incredible stuff. And when we place our lives and our work and everything and our thoughts and our concerns that weigh on us, when we place those things in the Savior's hands, just watch what He can do. And just know this, most of what He is doing, we won't be able to see until eternity. Our job's to stay faithful. His job is to do the miraculous work that He alone can do. Be encouraged. He's present. He's at work. And let's look forward to the day when we see all of the things He was doing through our imperfect efforts.

Gary Bauer:

A glorious day it will be. Pastor, that was very well said. Thank you for being with us on Family Talk. This book is really a fantastic book. It's exactly the book we need for a time like this. It's *Fake Christianity: 10 Traps of an Inauthentic Faith (and How to Avoid Them.)* Congratulations on writing a book exactly suited for the times. And thank you all out there for tuning in to Family Talk. Be with us regularly. We've got a lot of great shows coming up to help you navigate the challenging times in America and the times that we live in. God bless everybody until we're back again. And God bless you, Pastor, for the fine work that you're doing for the body of Christ.

Dr. Jed Coppenger: Thanks for having me.

Roger Marsh: Most of what God is doing through our imperfect efforts, we won't actually fully see until eternity. But the fact is, our job is to remain faithful and to trust that God is at work in our lives, regardless of what the outcome appears to be here on earth. You're listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, featuring a conversation with Gary Bauer, our senior vice president of public policy here at the Dobson Policy and Culture Center, and Gary's guest, Dr. Jed Coppenger. Now, if you missed any part of Gary's two-day conversation with Dr. Coppenger, go to jdfi.net and there you'll find part one and part two. You'll also find information there about Dr. Coppenger's book called *Fake Christianity: 10 Traps of An Inauthentic Faith (and How to Avoid Them.)*

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and from all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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