

## Dead Church Podcast Notes

### Acts Initiative

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### **Ep. 15 – Lies Christians Believe About Family and Marriage**

As we saw a couple videos ago, the average Christian life is often very “family-focused.” Christians spend time working a job so they can provide a good life for their families. They spend a lot of time with their kids, and Christians often view their family as their ministry – in other words, they serve God by taking care of their families. They keep their families nearby. They have family get-togethers. They celebrate holidays with their families. They go on vacations with their families.

Growing up in the Church, I was always told that it would be my responsibility to provide for my family. As the “head of the household,” I would need to make sure the family is taken care of, I would need to train the kids well, I would need to make sure the family keeps reading the Bible and going to Church. It wasn’t just that this was something I should make sure happens... I was taught that this is supposed to be my focus.

Almost all Christians have heard that we’re supposed to “focus on the family.” Our Church culture has told us that the Christian life should be centered on the family; and that the family unit is what is most important. We should build good, strong families founded on faith, love, and hope. First and foremost, we should make sure our families have what they need.

Most Christians view family as one of the most important aspects to the Christian life. Many people think that’s what Christianity is all about.

Here’s what Jesus said about family:

“Don’t think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A person’s enemies will be members of his own family. Those who love their father or mother more than they love me are not worthy of me. Those who love their son or daughter more than they love me are not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who try to hold on to their lives will give up true life. Those who give up their lives for my sake will hold on to true life.”<sup>1</sup>

Here, Jesus said something very different than what the Church says today.

Jesus said he came to split up families – not join them together. He said your father, your mother, your son and your daughter need to take a back seat, and the Kingdom of God has to come first – otherwise you’re not worthy of him.

Now, sure, we all understand that we should love God more than our families. Christians often use catchphrases like, “God first, family second.” When Christians say things like this, usually what they mean is, “You should love God first. And God wants you to love your family, so you love your family second.” But if we’re honest with ourselves about what Jesus said, he didn’t say, “God first, family second.” He seemed to be saying, “God first. Period.”

Actually, he seemed to take it even further than that. He seemed to say, “I didn’t come to give you a big happy family, where you all focus on the family and everyone in your family loves each other and gets along. I came to divide your family. I came to split you up. If you follow me, your family will

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 10:34-39

be your enemies. And if that doesn't settle well with you, you're not worthy of me."

I mean... that is what he said.

Jesus came to turn families against each other. The obvious implication is that loving God and obeying God doesn't mean loving our families or focusing on our families. In fact, Jesus said the opposite. So, where does the Church get this mindset that we should focus on the family? Maybe this passage is just misunderstood, and we should look at some of the other things Jesus had to say about family.

"All those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or farms for my name's sake will get more than they left, and they will inherit eternal life."<sup>2</sup>

Here, Jesus said that those who inherit eternal life will be those who left their families. That's certainly not saying we should focus on the family, so let's keep searching.

"Jesus said to another man, 'Follow me!' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, 'Let the people who are dead bury their own dead. You must go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' Another man said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say goodbye to my family.' Jesus said, 'Anyone who begins to plow a field but keeps looking back is of no use in the Kingdom of God.'"<sup>3</sup>

In both passages, Jesus said the same thing he said in the earlier passage: "If you love your family more than you love me, you're not worthy of me."

The first dude just wanted to bury his dad. That's it! He wasn't saying he wouldn't live for the Kingdom. He just said he had to bury his dad first, and then he would live for the Kingdom. But Jesus said, "No. The Kingdom of God must be your number one priority. Even a funeral can't get in the way!"

The second dude was ready to leave his family and follow Jesus – that's a bigger commitment than almost any modern Christian. The Kingdom was so important to him that he was willing to leave his family. Yet Jesus said he was of no use in the Kingdom of God. Why? Because saying goodbye to his family was a higher priority to him than the Kingdom of God.

How do we know it was a higher priority? Because he wanted to do it first.

The Kingdom of God must always be first. The Kingdom of God must remain the top priority. Even family can't come in the way. Jesus does not want people who are divided. Either you're loyal to Jesus, or you're not. Either you have fidelity, or you don't. Either you're reliable and can be trusted to do the right thing, or you can't.

Jesus wasn't interested in having half-hearted followers. If you're not willing to absolutely surrender your entire life over to doing what Jesus wants, proclaiming his Kingdom, and giving up everything for him, Jesus doesn't want you to sign up.

That's harsh, and the opposite of what Churches preach today, but it's true! When Jesus had large crowds following him, he didn't try to keep people from leaving – in fact, he did the opposite:

"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me but does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters – or even his own life – he cannot be my follower. Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my follower.'"<sup>4</sup>

After saying this, Jesus went on to tell those people that they needed to count the cost of following him before they tried to join. He said that if you want to build a tower, you don't just start building; first you make sure you have everything you need to finish the job, otherwise you don't even try to start. Or, if a king is going to war, first he makes sure he has what it takes to win the war, otherwise he doesn't fight in the first place. Then Jesus said, "In the same way, you must give up

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 19:29

<sup>3</sup> Luke 9:59-62

<sup>4</sup> Luke 14:25-27

everything you have to be my follower. Salt is good, but if it loses its salty taste, you cannot make it salty again. It is no good for the soil or for the manure pile; it is thrown away.”<sup>5</sup>

Throughout this section, Jesus told us to recognize what it’s going to cost to follow him. He said if you’re not ready, don’t sign up. If you’re not willing to accept the cost, then don’t try to follow him in the first place. If you’re going to be halfhearted when you follow him, then he would say the same thing he said to the man who prioritized his family: Don’t bother. If you’re going to keep looking back, you’re of no use in his Kingdom.

He said you must give up everything you have to be his follower. If you become the salt of the earth but you lose your salty taste because you weren’t ready for the extreme cost, Jesus said you’re good for nothing – not even a pile of manure. He literally said if you’re not willing to accept the cost, and you try to follow him anyway, you’re not even good for a pile of animal crap. That’s how serious Jesus is about this.

With Jesus, you’re either all in or you’re all out. There’s no such thing as a half-hearted or distracted follower of Jesus.

As we’ve talked about in earlier videos, the word in Greek that’s translated *faith* actually means *faith and faithfulness* at the same time. It means *fidelity*. It means *loyalty*. It means *reliability*. Jesus was saying you can’t be divided. You must have absolute fidelity to him. You can’t be half-hearted. If you’re not willing to absolutely surrender your entire life over to doing what Jesus wants, then don’t sign up. Count the cost. Look at what it’s going to cost you before you agree to join, otherwise you might not have what it takes and you won’t be of any use to him.

So, back to the beginning of the section we were just looking at. When Jesus said to count the cost, he said, “If anyone comes to me but does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters – or even his own life – he cannot be my follower.”<sup>6</sup>

Jesus obviously didn’t want us actually hating people, but he also obviously was not worried about people getting offended and leaving. He also obviously didn’t want us to “focus on the family” and have family be our ministry. He wants us so absurdly over-the-top in love with him that it seems like we don’t care about anything or anyone else in comparison to how obsessed we are with him!

What does it mean to be this obsessed with Jesus? Most Christians seem to think it means having strong feelings, strong emotions, singing songs, and crying. But that’s not what Jesus said.

He said being obsessed with him means we’re doing things with our lives that make it look like we hate our families. Therefore, family is clearly not supposed to be the focus. Your ministry is clearly not supposed to be your family. Being obsessed with Jesus means we’re doing things that not only make it look like we hate our families, but it makes it look like we hate even our own lives. And if we’re not this obsessed with Jesus and sold-out for him, he said we can’t even be his follower. That’s the cost Jesus was talking about. That’s the cost he wants us to consider before we sign up. That’s what it means to really follow Jesus. That’s what it means to really love Jesus.

Afterall, as we’ve already seen in this series, Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey my commands.”<sup>7</sup> “Those who have my commands and obey them are the ones who love me...”<sup>8</sup> “If people love me, they will obey my teaching.”<sup>9</sup> And John said, “Loving God means obeying his commands.”<sup>10</sup>

Loving God and being obsessed with Jesus isn’t about strong, emotional feelings. As we’ve been talking about in this series, it’s about your priorities. Your actions speak louder than words. Your

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 14:33-35

<sup>6</sup> Luke 14:26

<sup>7</sup> John 14:15

<sup>8</sup> John 14:21

<sup>9</sup> John 14:23

<sup>10</sup> 1 John 5:3

actions show what you truly love most. What is most important to you? What are you building your life around?

Jesus said it shouldn't be family.

Christians today build their lives around their families, and they think they're obeying God. They say the Christian life should be focused on the family, and they think this idea comes from the Bible.

But here's the reality: Jesus talked a lot about family,<sup>11</sup> and every single time, he said the opposite of what the Church says today. He never said to focus on the family. He never said your ministry can be your family. He never said to stay close to family. He never said to center your life on your family.

He said he's going to divide families. He said you're going to have to leave your family. He said your family cannot be your priority. He said it's going to look like you hate them.

So, then the question is, why?

If we're called to love others, why does Jesus want to divide families and separate families?

Christians know Jesus told us to love others – that's exactly why they think it's important for us to focus on our families and have strong families that are built on love. So why did Jesus say the opposite? He explained:

“If you love only the people who love you, you will get no reward. Even the tax collectors do that. And if you are nice only to your friends, you are no better than other people. Even the Gentiles are nice to their friends. Therefore you must be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”<sup>12</sup>

“If you love only the people who love you, what praise should you get? Even sinners love the people who love them. If you do good only to those who do good to you, what praise should you get? Even sinners do that!”<sup>13</sup>

“When you give a lunch or a dinner, don't invite only your friends, your family, your other relatives, and your rich neighbors. At another time they will invite you to eat with them, and you will be repaid. Instead, when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then you will be blessed, because they have nothing and cannot pay you back. But you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”<sup>14</sup>

This was his point: Yes, he commanded us to love. But he did not just command us to love our families, our friends, and everyone who will love us back. Why? Because that's what people do naturally. That's what unbelievers do. That's what sinners do. That doesn't make us different. That doesn't make us holy.

He said we must be perfect, just as our Father in heaven is perfect. Or – as God said to Israel in the Old Testament, we must be holy because God is holy.<sup>15</sup> He doesn't want us to look like all the unbelievers around us. He wants us to be different. And when he commanded us to love, he wanted that love to be different than theirs, too. They love their friends. They love their families. They love those who love them back.

If we only do the same, we're no different. He commanded us to love with a different kind of love – a love where we love like he loves. His command to us was, “I give you a new command: Love one another. You must love one another as I have loved you.”<sup>16</sup> “This is my command: Love each

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<sup>11</sup> Ref. Matthew 4:22, 5:46-48, 8:21-22, 10:34-39, 12:48-50; Mark 3:31-35, 10:29-30; Luke 6:32-36, 8:19-21, 9:59-62, 12:49-53, 14:12-14, 14:25-27, 18:29-30

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 5:46-48

<sup>13</sup> Luke 6:32-33

<sup>14</sup> Luke 14:12-14

<sup>15</sup> Ref. Leviticus 11:45, 19:2, 20:26

<sup>16</sup> John 13:34

other as I have loved you.”<sup>17</sup>

We’re commanded to love as he has loved us. That means our love for others should look just like his love for us. Our love should imitate his love. If we’re imitating him, our focus won’t be on our families and on those who love us back – because his love wasn’t focused on those who loved him back. We were his enemies when he loved us.

This is why Christianity is available to us as Gentiles. Paul explained:

“Remember that you are Gentiles in the flesh... Remember that in the past you were without Christ. You were not citizens of Israel, and you were strangers to the covenants of promise. You had no hope, and you did not know God. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away from God are brought near through the blood of Christ. Christ himself is our peace. He made both Jews and Gentiles one people, and broke down the wall of hate that divided them by giving his own body... His purpose was to make the two groups of people become one new people in him and in this way make peace. It was also Christ’s purpose to end the hatred between the two groups, to make them into one body, and to bring them back to God. Christ did all this with his death on the cross... Now you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer, but are citizens together with God’s holy people. You belong to God’s family... And in Christ you, too, are being built together with the Jews into a place where God lives through the Spirit.”<sup>18</sup>

Those of us who were Gentiles... we weren’t part of Israel. We didn’t have hope. We didn’t know God. We were his enemies. But through Jesus, we were brought in. We’re no longer foreigners. We’re citizens. We belong to his family. We receive his Spirit.

Jesus’ love wasn’t just that he looked out for his family, loved his family and his friends, and made sure that their needs were met. No, his love was different. He loved his enemies. He loved those who were outside his family. He loved those who hated him.

The same is true for those who are Jewish according to the flesh. God said to the Israelites, “You are not my people, and I am not your God.”<sup>19</sup>

Even the Israelites were not God’s people. The writings of the prophets were filled with messages from God, telling them that they had committed adultery against God. They had left him. They had abandoned him, and therefore, they were not his people. He wasn’t their God; they weren’t in his family. Paul wrote about the Jews, “It is not that God failed to keep his promise to them. But only some of the people of Israel are truly God’s people, and only some of Abraham’s descendants are truly children of Abraham.”<sup>20</sup>

And Jesus said to the Jews, “If you were really Abraham’s children, you would do the things Abraham did... If God were really your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and now I am here... You belong to your father the devil, and you want to do what he wants... The person who belongs to God obeys the words of God. But you don’t obey, because you don’t belong to God.”<sup>21</sup>

So, neither the Jews nor the Gentiles were part of God’s family. The only people who belong to God are those who obey God. Not even the Jews who thought they were part of God’s family were obeying him, therefore they were not part of his family either.

So, everyone – whether Jew or Gentile – had made themselves God’s enemies. They weren’t part of his family. They hated God. They rebelled against God. God told them, “You are not my people!”

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<sup>17</sup> John 15:12

<sup>18</sup> Ephesians 2:11-22

<sup>19</sup> Hosea 1:9

<sup>20</sup> Romans 9:6-7

<sup>21</sup> John 8:39-47

Here's the point: Jesus didn't only love those who loved him back.

His love that we're supposed to emulate wasn't about loving his friends and his family. He loved us while we were his enemies. His radical, extreme, and costly love was directed to those outside of his family. He didn't "focus on the family." And his family wasn't his ministry. He focused on those outside of his family – the poor, the hungry, the thirsty, the helpless, the sick, and the slaves. We were poor, and he was rich, so he made himself poor so that we could become rich.<sup>22</sup> We were hungry, and he gave his body so we could eat; we were thirsty, and he poured out his own blood so we could drink.<sup>23</sup> We were strangers, and he welcomed us into his home and made us part of his family.<sup>24</sup> We were sick, and by his wounds he healed us.<sup>25</sup> We were prisoners and slaves of sin, and he paid our ransom with his own life.<sup>26</sup>

His command to us was that we go and do the same.

So, Christians aren't called to build their lives around their families. They aren't called to love those who love them back. They aren't called to focus on the family. Christians are called to love complete strangers the same way that most people only love their families. More than that, Christians are called to love complete strangers with a radical love that most people wouldn't even show towards their own families.

God wants people who prioritize what he prioritizes. He wants people who love with his love. He wants people who give everything to the Kingdom without holding anything back – even if it costs them everything that's important to them. As Jesus said, "...you must give up everything you have to be my follower."<sup>27</sup>

Family is not the exception.

As Christians, we know we're saved by having the same kind of faith that Abraham had. But as we've been talking about throughout this series, if Abraham hadn't obeyed God, we wouldn't be saying that Abraham had faith. His obedience was part of his faith. If we're supposed to have the same kind of faith Abraham had, then we should have the same kind of obedience Abraham had.

So, let me ask you: What was the first command God gave Abraham?

"Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land I will show you."<sup>28</sup>

Jesus was not the first one to say that following God meant leaving your family. God always said that his Kingdom is a higher priority than family.<sup>29</sup> And as the writer of Hebrews summarized, "It was by faith Abraham obeyed God's call to go to another place God promised to give him. He left his own country, not knowing where he was going. It was by faith that he lived like a foreigner in the Promised Land... Abraham was waiting for the city that has real foundations – the city planned and built by God... They recognized that they were like foreigners and visitors on earth. When people say such things, they show they are looking for a country that will be their own. If they had been thinking about the country they had left, they could have gone back. But they were waiting for a better country – a heavenly one. So God is not ashamed to be called their God, because he has prepared a city for them."<sup>30</sup>

If Abraham had said, "My family is my ministry; I need to focus on my family," then no one

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<sup>22</sup> Ref. 2 Corinthians 8:9

<sup>23</sup> Ref. Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

<sup>24</sup> Ref. Ephesians 2:11-22

<sup>25</sup> Ref. Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24

<sup>26</sup> Ref. Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; John 8:31-36; Romans 6-8

<sup>27</sup> Luke 14:33

<sup>28</sup> Genesis 12:1

<sup>29</sup> Ref. Exodus 32:22-29; Leviticus 10:1-7; Deuteronomy 13:6-11, 33:8-9

<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16

would talk about the faith of Abraham. We would be talking about how he didn't have faith. God told Abraham to leave his family. And he obeyed. As Hebrews explained, that obedience was part of his faith. It showed that he prioritized the Kingdom of God instead of his family. If he had prioritized his family and the country he had left, he could have gone back. He could have returned to them. His faith was demonstrated in that he prioritized God's Kingdom rather than his own family.

Jesus calls us to do the same. He wants us to be different. He wants us to be holy. He wants us to be people who live in this world like we're foreigners. We're just visiting. This isn't where we belong, so we're not focused on the things of this world.

Like Abraham recognized that he was a visitor on this earth, we need to recognize that we don't belong to this world. We don't belong to this world any more than Jesus belonged to this world. When Jesus prayed for us, he said, "...they don't belong to the world, just as I don't belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world but to protect them from the Evil One. They don't belong to the world, just as I don't belong to the world. *Make them holy by your truth; your teaching is truth.*"<sup>31</sup>

We don't belong to this world. Jesus doesn't belong to this world. We are made holy – different – through the truth. God's teaching is truth. We're not made holy through hearing his teaching. We're made holy through *doing* his teaching.

"This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other."<sup>32</sup>

We are made different than the world by living in love – the kind of love Jesus showed for us. It separates us. It makes us different. It makes us stand out. It makes us shine.

Jesus said, "All people will know that you are my followers if you love one another."<sup>33</sup>

The only way that could be true is if our love is different than everyone else's. If our love looks the same as everyone else's love, then no one is going to know we are his followers simply by seeing our love. Our love must be different. It must make us stand out. It must be radical. Our love comes from having different priorities than everyone else in the world. Our love is different because there's something more important to us than our friends, our family, or our own lives.

If we are born again – children of God, living by the Spirit – then we should have the same priorities God has.

So many Christians get this wrong. If they're not focused on their kids, they're focused on their marriage. How many times have you read a Christian book on marriage? How many times have you listened to a sermon on marriage? How many times have you heard Christian marriage counseling? How many times have you talked to married Christian couples about marriage?

Christians are almost always saying you have to focus on your marriage. They say you need to build a strong marriage. Christians think they need to spend time settling into marriage before they can really do anything else. Christian marriage advice almost always says stuff like: Spend time together, go on dates, get to know each other, focus on what the other person wants. I've heard many Christians say things like, "we're focusing on our marriage right now."

Is this biblical?

Sure, husbands and wives should spend time together, talk to each other, and get to know each other. Paul said husbands should love their wives, and wives should love their husbands.<sup>34</sup> But Paul also gave another piece of marriage advice:

"Brothers and sisters, this is what I mean: The time is short. So starting now, those who have

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<sup>31</sup> John 17:14-17, (EXB; italics NLT)

<sup>32</sup> 1 John 3:11

<sup>33</sup> John 13:35

<sup>34</sup> Ref. Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19

wives should live as if they had no wives.”<sup>35</sup>

How often do you hear that verse brought up in a book on marriage, at a marriage conference, or in marriage counseling? Paul’s marriage advice was, “don’t live like you’re married.”

What was he talking about?!

Well, he explained what he was saying:

“I want you to be free from concern. A man who is not married is concerned with the Lord’s work, trying to please the Lord. But a man who is married is concerned with things of the world, trying to please his wife. He must think about two things – pleasing his wife and pleasing the Lord. A woman who is not married or a betrothed woman is concerned with the Lord’s work. She wants to be holy in body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned with things of the world, as to how she can please her husband. I am saying this to help you, not to limit you. But I want you to live in the right way, to give yourselves fully to the Lord without distraction.”<sup>36</sup>

So, he was saying people who are married should live as if they’re not married because people who are not married aren’t distracted – they’re focused on the Lord’s work – the Kingdom of God. But people who are married get distracted with each other – they start thinking about how to please one another.

In other words, he was saying that trying to build a strong marriage and focus on your marriage is a distraction. His exact words were, “concerned with the things of the world.” Christians tend to think that “the things of the world” are just material things. We shouldn’t be distracted with material things. And it is true that we shouldn’t be distracted with material things – we talked about that in an earlier video. But here Paul said that if we’re focused on trying to please our spouse, then we’re distracted with the things of the world. Why? Because the “things of the world” are all the things that pertain to this world, and this life and are not about the Kingdom of God. It’s not just material possessions – it’s everything.

So many Christians think they have to focus on their marriage because their marriage is struggling – they’re fighting, they’re arguing, and they’re unhappy. The Church comes along and tells them to spend time focusing on their marriage and spend time with each other to solve those problems. Quite frankly, it’s no different than the marriage advice you’d get from an unbeliever.

But it doesn’t solve the problem. It makes it worse. James said that we fight and argue because of our own selfish desires – we want things, and we don’t have them.<sup>37</sup> His very next point was what we talked about earlier – if you want things for your own pleasure, you’re an adulterer: You hate God. You’re his enemy. You’re not giving yourself to God alone.<sup>38</sup>

So, if our marriages are struggling – if we’re fighting, we’re arguing, and we’re unhappy – what’s the real problem? And what’s the real solution? James said the real problem is that you want things for yourself. You’re thinking about yourself. You’re thinking about what’s good for you rather than thinking about the Kingdom of God and what’s good for others. Therefore, you’re committing adultery against God. You’re not keeping fidelity with God.

So, is the solution, “Spend time with each other and focus on yourselves?” Or is the solution, “Get your selfish desires under control and get your priorities straight – you’re living for the wrong things!”? That’s what James was saying. And that’s what Paul was saying.

Paul was saying, “Stop trying to please each other, and instead make everything you do about pleasing the Lord without being distracted by one another! Give yourself to God alone!”<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>35</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:29

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:32-35

<sup>37</sup> Ref. James 4:1-3

<sup>38</sup> Ref. James 4:4-10

<sup>39</sup> Ref. James 4:5

Church's "solution" for marriage problems is the exact opposite of what the Bible says. The Bible's solution is, "Get your eyes off yourselves. Stop focusing on your marriage and how unhappy you are, and instead get your eyes on the Kingdom and live for the Kingdom without distraction."

If Christians would live that way, they wouldn't be fighting and arguing, because instead of focusing on their own selfish desires, they would be focusing on the Kingdom of God. Instead of thinking about themselves, they would be thinking about the lost, the poor, the needy, the dying, the lame, the blind, the naked, the thirsty, and the hungry. They would be thinking about what they could do to show the radical love of Jesus to others. And with both of them thinking about that, suddenly they would find themselves living as a team working together with a common purpose.

If your focus is on having a happy marriage, you'll never have a happy marriage, because your focus will be on pleasing one another instead of pleasing God!

The only important thing is the Kingdom of God. It is the priority. It is what comes first – not your marriage. Jesus told a parable about a king who threw a feast and invited a ton of people to come to the feast.<sup>40</sup> But one by one, they made excuses. One of those excuses was, "We just got married. We can't come." He ended the parable by saying that none of those people who made excuses will ever taste his banquet.

Jesus won't accept your marriage as an excuse. If you focus on your marriage instead of the Kingdom, you are distracted. You are divided. You don't have loyalty. You don't have fidelity. And that means you don't have faith. And if you don't have faith, you won't find yourself participating in the marriage supper of the Lamb.<sup>41</sup> That's what Jesus was saying in that parable.

For those of you who are single, the same concept applies to you. Is marriage your goal? Is it what you dream about? Is it what you're working toward? If so, then your priorities are wrong. The Kingdom of God isn't your goal. It's not what you want most, and it's not what you're working toward. You have a higher priority – something you love more than God!

Paul told singles, "If you are not married, do not try to find a wife."<sup>42</sup>

He was not saying it's a sin to get married. But he was saying you can't live for marriage. He was saying the same thing he said to married people – you need to live for the Kingdom without distraction.

Nearly every unbeliever in the world is looking for romance. They're looking for that special someone who they're hoping will make them happy. They're looking for intimacy. They're looking for companionship. They're looking for some kind of relationship. Christian singles today, in general, are no different.

I know I was no different. I wanted to get married more than anything else. I often made plans with friends simply because I wanted to be around that one particular girl I liked. I did everything I could to get some kind of romantic relationship. I was no different than the world. I wasn't set apart for God. I wasn't holy. I thought I was honoring God because I was "saving myself for marriage." But I wasn't honoring God. I was rebelling against him and abandoning him as I threw myself into a pursuit to find happiness in someone other than him.

I thought I loved God, but I hated him. I thought I loved God, but I had another master. The Kingdom of God was not my priority. Therefore, I didn't love God. I didn't stay holy. I became like the world.

Jesus isn't looking for people who just don't have sex until they're married. That's not what being pure is about. Christians have missed the whole point; they've taken verses they don't understand, and they turn them into laws that they say people have to obey. Paul said:

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<sup>40</sup> Ref. Luke 14:16-24

<sup>41</sup> Ref. Revelation 19:6-9

<sup>42</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:27

## Ep. 15 – Lies Christians Believe About Family and Marriage

*“The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith. But some people have missed this whole point. They have turned away from these things and spend their time in meaningless discussions. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not understand either what they are talking about or what they so confidently assert.”<sup>43</sup>*

The purpose of everything the New Testament says is for people to have true, biblical, radical love – a love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a genuine faith. That genuine faith is genuine fidelity – an undistracted, undivided heart.

The point is that you’re supposed to live a life of radical love where you prioritize others above yourself and you’re completely undistracted by the things of this world – including romantic relationships.

It’s not about law, it’s about fidelity. It’s about loyalty. It’s about reliability. It’s about not getting distracted by this life. Jesus wants people who give up everything for him. Jesus is looking for people who completely stop living for this world and this life. He wants people who have died to this life and no longer live for themselves but live for him.<sup>44</sup> He wants people who are undivided, undistracted. Being different is about not being like the world. Being holy is about offering our entire lives as a sacrifice to God. It’s about living like we’re just visiting this earth. It’s about living like aliens.

As long as we keep getting distracted by anything in this short, temporary life, we’re no different.

Paul said, “A soldier wants to please the commanding officer, so no one serving in the army wastes time with everyday matters.”<sup>45</sup>

It doesn’t matter what those everyday matters are. If your focus is not on pleasing your commanding officer, you’re not following him. Paul also wrote about how everything that had once been important to him was then worth nothing to him.<sup>46</sup> He said he considered it the same as worthless trash. He said the only important thing to him was living for Jesus, becoming like him, and knowing him. He told the Philippians to imitate him in this and think this way too.<sup>47</sup> But then he contrasted that to those who don’t adopt this way of thinking:

“Many people live like enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often told you about them, and it makes me cry to tell you about them now. In the end, they will be destroyed. They do whatever their bodies want, they are proud of their shameful acts, and they think only about earthly things.”<sup>48</sup>

Do you live as an enemy of the cross of Christ? Or do you live as someone who is completely devoted to the Kingdom of God without distraction? Do you do whatever your body wants? Do you realize that that includes making marriage your priority, even if you save yourself for marriage? If you want to get married, and your actions show that this is your priority, you’re still doing whatever your body wants, even if you do in fact wait until marriage. That’s not God’s standard of purity. God’s standard of purity is when all you care about is him and his Kingdom and obeying his commands to prioritize the needs of others. Prioritizing marriage and prioritizing your own family is not what God wants. It’s what your body wants.

Are you proud of your shameful acts? Shameful acts include only thinking about relationships, only thinking about having a girlfriend or a boyfriend, or only thinking about getting married. Are you thinking only about earthly things? Earthly things include relationships. Earthly things include family. Earthly things include marriage.

Only one thing is important.

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<sup>43</sup> 1 Timothy 1:5-7 (EXB; italics NLT)

<sup>44</sup> Ref. 2 Corinthians 5:15

<sup>45</sup> 2 Timothy 2:4

<sup>46</sup> Ref. Philippians 3:3-11

<sup>47</sup> Ref. Philippians 3:15

<sup>48</sup> Philippians 3:18-19

The Acts Initiative Podcast: Podcast Notes for Dead Church

“To me the only important thing about living is Christ...”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Philippians 1:21