

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 8 – Lies Christians Believe About The Christian Life

A few videos ago, we read this verse: “Jesus answered, ‘And why do you refuse to obey God’s command for the sake of your traditions? You rejected the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. You are hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: These people show honor to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is worthless. The things they teach are nothing but human rules.’”¹

In this passage, Jesus told the Pharisees that they had abandoned the things God said to do. They weren’t obeying God – they were only following human traditions.

The Pharisees didn’t think of themselves this way. They thought they obeyed God. Everyone around them thought they obeyed God. They were considered the most devout people in all of Israel. They tried harder than everyone else to obey God. But Jesus said they were completely neglecting the commands of God, and they were only following human tradition. Just like Sardis, the Pharisees had a reputation that they were alive – but they were dead.²

The important question Christians need to ask is this: Are we like the Pharisees, or are we like the early Church? What does it mean to be a Christian? Or, in other words, what are the things a Christian should do? What does it mean to obey the commands of God? What should a Christian life look like on a day-to-day basis?

We want to make sure we’re not like the Pharisees. We want to make sure we don’t replace the things God wants with our own human traditions and rituals.

As I grew up in Church, I thought this is what the Christian life should look like:

- Going to church on Sunday
- Reading the Bible in the mornings
- Praying
- Singing worship songs on Sunday, or on my own
- Getting together with Christian friends to talk about God and the Bible (“fellowship”)
- Trying to not sin, and getting better at not sinning
- Getting help from Christian friends for sins that I repeatedly struggled with (“accountability”)
- Listening to or reading Christian teaching, sermons, and books
- Tithing at least 10% of what I made
- Memorizing Bible verses
- Going on missions trips
- Serving in my church in some way (children’s ministry, the sound team, the drama team, the greeting team, etc...)

¹ Matthew 15:3, 15:6-9

² Ref. Revelation 3:1

- Talking to unbelievers about Jesus (“evangelizing”)

This list is not exhaustive, but it’s a general sense of what I felt like it meant to be a Christian. This is how I viewed the Christian life. These are the things I thought a Christian should generally be doing. Some of these things may be unique to the church I grew up in, and some other churches might have things that are unique to them; but the point is that Christians have things we do today in Church, and in life, that we view as “what a Christian should look like.”

In this video, we want to look at whether these things are the things that should set a Christian apart from the world. Are these the things the Bible says a Christian should be doing? Are these the things that make a Christian stand apart from an unbeliever?

Are these things different than what the Pharisees were doing?

In general, we get our idea of what it means to be a Christian from the culture around us. Our Christian culture tells us what it means to be a Christian, and as we begin to do those things, we then think, “Okay, now I’m a Christian.”

But, here’s the problem: All throughout the New Testament, the Bible warned us that the Church would be filled with many false believers.

It is the biggest warning in the New Testament.³

These warnings don’t just tell us that there will be some people in the Church who are false Christians. No – these warnings tell us that the false Christians will be everywhere. Many will be deceived.

Jesus told us the way is narrow that enters life, and few find that road.⁴ And the apostles said that many will be deceived and will go to destruction.⁵ They will think they are following the Lord, but they will end up failing to enter. Jesus said many will call him, “Lord, Lord” on judgment day, but he will say to them, “I never knew you.”⁶

Paul warned us that the Church would become full of people who do not obey God.⁷ We know he was warning us about the Church, because he concluded by saying, “Avoid these people,” and in 1 Corinthians, he said that when he told Christians to avoid certain people, he was not talking about people in the world – he was not warning about unbelievers – he was talking about those who call themselves brothers and sisters, yet who do those things.⁸ Therefore, in 2 Timothy 3, when Paul warned that the times would be terrible because people would act a certain way, he was warning that the times would be terrible because people who call themselves Christians would act that way.

He was warning us that the Church would be marked by apostasy. He described Christians as loving themselves, loving money, being disobedient, having an appearance of godliness, but lacking the power of God.

He warned us this was coming.

So, here’s the thing:

Is it safe to determine what the Christian life should look like by looking at our Christian culture? What if our culture has already turned from God like Jesus and the apostles all told us it

³ Ref. Matthew 7:15-23, 13:24-43, 24:10; Acts 20:29-31; Romans 16:17-18; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4, 11:13-15, 11:26; Galatians 1:6-9, 2:4-5, 4:17-18, 5:9-12; Ephesians 4:15, 5:6-7; Colossians 2:1-4, 2:8-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:2-4, 2:8-12; 1 Timothy 1:3-11, 4:1-7, 6:3-5, 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:17-18, 3:1-9, 4:2-4; Titus 1:10-16; Hebrews 12:15, 13:9; 2 Peter 2:1-3, 2:10-19, 3:16-17; 1 John 2:4, 2:9, 2:18-26, 3:1-10, 4:1-6; 2 John 1:7-11; Jude 1:1-25

⁴ Ref. Matthew 7:13-14

⁵ Ref. 2 Peter 2:1-3

⁶ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

⁷ Ref. 2 Timothy 3:1-5

⁸ Ref. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

would? What if our Church culture has already become apostate?

Using the Old Testament as our guide, we can easily see that people who commit apostasy typically don't realize they've committed apostasy. As we saw at the beginning of this series, Ancient Israel was described as apostate – yet they still thought they obeyed God. They prayed to God, they had holy meetings, they gave God sacrifices, they sang songs to God, they fasted, and they did many things out of what they thought was devotion to God.

But God said they were apostate.

And the New Testament warns us that it will happen again – this time, to the Church.

If we know the Church is going to become apostate at some point in time, then we cannot determine what a Christian life should look like by comparing ourselves to the Christian culture around us. Because what if the apostasy has already happened?

The apostles warned us that people would be deceived. They warned us that people would distort Scripture. They warned us that people would follow false teachers.

What does that mean?

It means they will still read Scripture, they will still listen to Christian teaching, and they will still think they are following and obeying God.

But they won't be. They will be deceived.

Paul warned us that we should not evaluate ourselves by comparing ourselves against those around us. He said, "If anyone thinks he is important when he really is not, he is only deceiving himself. Each person should examine his own actions and not compare himself with others. Then he can be proud for what he himself has done. Each person will carry their own load."⁹

Paul was warning that we shouldn't examine ourselves based on those around us. We should look at ourselves. We should look at our own actions. Do our actions line up with what the Bible teaches? Do our actions line up with what Jesus and the apostles taught?

Paul also said, "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. They use themselves to measure themselves, and they judge themselves by what they themselves are. What fools!"¹⁰

A few verses later, he said, "It is not those who commend themselves who are approved but those the Lord commends."¹¹

Paul was saying that there were people who measured themselves by themselves. They used themselves as the standard, and then said, "Look! I meet the standard!"

That's ridiculous – Paul called them fools.

But we do the same thing in the Church today. We've created a culture of Christianity, then we use that culture as our measuring-stick! When we see that we're living up to the standard of the very culture we created, we pretend that we're approved by God!

This is ridiculous! Only those commended by the Lord are truly approved! We're not approved just because we live up to our own standards! We're not approved just because we look like the Christian culture around us!

It doesn't matter if you look like all the Christians around you. Do you look like what Jesus said a Christian should look like?

Here's another example:

In Revelation 3, Jesus wrote a letter to the Church in Sardis. He said, "I know your works.

⁹ Galatians 6:3-5

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 10:12

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 10:18

You have a reputation that you are alive, but really you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what you have left which is about to die. I have found that what you are doing is less than what my God wants. So remember what you have received and heard. Obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.”¹²

The Church in Sardis had a reputation that they were alive. Everyone thought they were alive. Everyone thought they were exactly what God wanted. But they were dead.

Think about it. If you were one of the people in the Church of Sardis, and you looked around at the culture around you, you would have thought everyone was alive. You would have compared yourself to them and concluded that you were alive, too. If you believed that they were alive, and you were one of them, you would have also believed that you were alive!

But Jesus said you’re dead.

If you compare yourself to the culture around you, you might not know that you’re dead when you’re dead.

The modern Church is full of people who compare themselves to those around them. They look at themselves and think they’re approved by God because they look just like everyone else around them. The Christian culture around us has the reputation of being alive...but it’s dead.

We need to know what the Bible says it means to be a Christian. We need to know what the Bible says it means to be alive.

Look at our list again. Look at what we tend to think the Christian life should look like:

- Going to church on Sunday
- Reading the Bible in the mornings
- Praying
- Singing worship songs on Sunday, or on my own
- Getting together with Christian friends to talk about God and the Bible (“fellowship”)
- Trying to not sin, and getting better at not sinning
- Getting help from Christian friends for sins that I repeatedly struggled with (“accountability”)
- Listening to or reading Christian teaching, sermons, and books
- Tithing at least 10% of what I made
- Memorizing Bible verses
- Going on missions trips
- Serving in my church in some way (children’s ministry, the sound team, the drama team, the greeting team, etc...)
- Talking to unbelievers about Jesus (“evangelizing”)

There’s something remarkable about this list. There’s something about the things on this list that most Christians don’t seem to recognize – something that no one notices:

This list is a perfectly accurate description of the life of the Pharisees. They did everything on this list.

Let’s go through the list in detail...

Going to Church, Reading the Bible, Praying, and Singing Worship Songs

We think a Christian should go to church on Sundays, read the Bible, pray, and sing worship

¹² Revelation 3:1-3

songs.

This isn't really any different than the Pharisees. The Pharisees met together every Sabbath day at their Synagogues. They got together to read the Bible, teach from the Bible, and sing songs to God. They did the exact same thing we do.

The Pharisees went to "church on Sunday" in a manner of speaking. It's important to remember: Judaism was not something God saw as evil. God established Judaism through Moses. When the Pharisees gathered and read the Bible, they were meeting together as God's people. They would read the Law of God, the same Scriptures we have, and worship the same God we worship.

As Christians, we believe that we should read the Bible. We talk about having our "quiet times" or our "devotions" or whatever other names Christians give it – we talk about getting up in the morning to read the Bible. Christians talk about reading the Bible as if it gives strength for the day. They read the Bible to "feed" themselves. They read the Bible to get "life" from it.

This is the same thing the Pharisees did. Jesus said to them, "You carefully study the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. They do in fact tell about me, but you refuse to come to me to have that life."¹³

The Pharisees carefully studied Scripture. They read Scripture every day. They spent a lot of time reading the Bible. And, they did it because they thought it gave them life. They thought it was food. But, reading the Bible doesn't give you life. You must come to Jesus to have life, and Scripture explains what it means to come to him. If you're getting up in the morning and reading the Bible, that doesn't make you any different than the Pharisees. That doesn't set you apart from the people Jesus called hypocrites and condemned.

Christians talk about singing worship songs. They talk about praising God. But, again – this is no different than the Pharisees.

The Pharisees sang the Psalms David wrote. They gathered together and sang songs to God. In fact, this was something practiced all throughout the Old Testament – all throughout Israel – even when Israel was completely rebelling against God. They still thought they were following God, and they sang songs to him.

As we saw earlier in this series, when God sent the prophets to Israel, he warned them that he was about to punish them – but the people still thought they were obeying God. They thought they were worshipping God.

God said to them, "The Lord says, 'I hate and reject your feasts; I cannot stand your religious meetings. If you offer me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I won't accept them. You bring your best fellowship offerings of fattened cattle, but I will ignore them. Take your noisy songs away from me! I won't listen to the music of your harps.'"¹⁴

God warned them that their religious meetings were not what he wanted. Their songs didn't please him. Their sacrifices weren't enough. He didn't care. He didn't want their sacrifices, he hated their meetings, and he refused to listen to their songs.

So, if we think the Christian life looks like gathering together to have religious meetings – meetings where we pray and sing songs – then nothing we're doing is different from what the Israelites did just before God destroyed them with Babylon. It's no different than what the Pharisees did every Sabbath. God hated what they did. He explained why he hated it – but for now, we need to understand that, in and of itself, this is not what the Christian life is supposed to look like.

It's not wrong to come to God and pray or sing songs, but in and of itself, this is not what it means to obey God.

¹³ John 5:39-40

¹⁴ Amos 5:21-23

“Fellowship”

Many Christians think being a Christian means we should talk about God and talk about the Bible. They call this “fellowship” (which is not what *fellowship* means in the Bible – we’ll look at this in more detail later).

The Pharisees also talked about God! The Pharisees talked about the Bible! Jesus often rebuked the Scribes and the Pharisees (the Scribes were the teachers of the Law). They were the ones who taught Scripture to everyone else. They prided themselves on the fact that they knew about God better than anyone else. The Scribes and Pharisees always spoke about God. They always spoke about the Bible. It was what they were known for! It was their reputation! Everyone thought they loved God because they kept God at the center of their conversations!

Talking about God and talking about the Bible does not make you a Christian. Again, in and of itself, it is not obedience to God.

Listening to Teaching

Most Christians think we should listen to sermons or other forms of teaching – whether it be on Sunday or in our own free time. Christians download sermons or watch them on YouTube. They buy countless Christian books. They read Christian blogs.

Again, this is no different than the Pharisees.

The Pharisees always listened to teaching. They gathered and taught the Scriptures and listened to the teaching of the rabbis. They also had countless books they would read and many rabbis they would follow.

What we do today is no different than what the Pharisees did. We’ve already discussed this in detail.

Tithing

Christians think it’s important to tithe. Christians believe it’s important to tithe ten percent of all our income.

But Jesus said about the Pharisees, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You pay tithe on everything you have – even your mint, dill, and cumin. But you ignore the really important teachings of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These are the things you should do, without neglecting those other things. Blind guides! You are like a person who picks a fly out of a drink and then swallows a camel!”¹⁵

The Pharisees paid tithe far more diligently than we do! They paid tithe on everything they had! They grew herbs and tithed on those herbs! Christians today just tithe on their income. Think about it: how often do you tithe ten percent of the tomatoes you grow in your garden? The Pharisees would have tithed on those, too. If anything, Christians today don’t tithe as well as the Pharisees did. So, tithing doesn’t set us apart.

Memorizing Scripture

Many Christians believe they should memorize Scripture. But, once again, this is no different than the Pharisees. The Pharisees knew Scripture far better than Christians do today. They could quote entire books of the Bible from memory.

In fact, when Jesus was in the wilderness, Satan quoted Scripture!¹⁶ Satan himself has Bible verses memorized!

¹⁵ Matthew 23:23-24

¹⁶ Ref. Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13

Memorizing the Bible does not make us Christians!

Look at our list again!

- ~~Going to church on Sunday~~
- ~~Reading the Bible in the mornings~~
- ~~Praying~~
- ~~Singing worship songs on Sunday, or on my own~~
- ~~Getting together with Christian friends to talk about God and the Bible (“fellowship”)~~
- Trying to not sin, and getting better at not sinning
- Getting help from Christian friends for sins that I repeatedly struggled with (“accountability”)
- ~~Listening to or reading Christian teaching, sermons, and books~~
- ~~Tithing at least 10% of what I made~~
- ~~Memorizing Bible verses~~
- Going on missions trips
- Serving in my church in some way (children’s ministry, the sound team, the drama team, the greeting team, etc...)
- Talking to unbelievers about Jesus (“evangelizing”)

So far, none of these things set us apart from the Pharisees or Ancient Israel in the Old Testament. Some of these things don’t even set us apart from Satan himself! Yet these are the things we think it means to be a Christian?

Let’s keep going...

Evangelism and Missions Trips

Christians go on missions trips to evangelize or help others evangelize. We gather a group of people together and travel to distant places to preach to the lost and make new converts. Many Christians do this in their youth, and honestly, it often ends up just being a social get-together.

Christians think going on missions trips is what a Christian should do.

But the Pharisees did that, too! They traveled in order to reach people. They evangelized. They tried to make new converts. Jesus said to them, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You travel across land and sea to make one convert. When you find that person, you make him more fit for hell than you are.”¹⁷

The Pharisees traveled across land and sea to make new converts. But when they did make a convert, they didn’t lead that person into life – they made that convert more fit for hell than they were! They made that convert into another Pharisee!

Going on missions trips and evangelizing doesn’t make Christians any different than anyone in any other religion. People go on missions trips! People evangelize! I’ve had Muslims evangelize to me! People travel and preach on behalf of their religion. This is not something that separates Christians. The Pharisees did the same thing.

Just because you preach to the lost doesn’t mean those converts are going to go to heaven! They will only gain life if you preach what Scripture actually teaches! But Christians usually are only preaching what the Church taught them. Christians think they’re preaching the truth, because they’re

¹⁷ Matthew 23:15

preaching what the Church told them. But we were warned that the Church would fall away! How do you know that what you're preaching is even biblical? How do you know that you're not just like the Pharisees? How do you know that you're not making a convert twice as fit for hell as you are? Do you realize that the Bible says you can preach in Jesus' name, but still lead people to destruction?¹⁸

Evangelism, in and of itself, is not what makes us Christian. Does that mean we shouldn't do it? No. But it doesn't make us Christian. And it does more harm than good if what we're preaching isn't the truth. If we are preaching a false gospel or unbiblical lies, we're not serving Jesus – we're serving Satan.¹⁹

On a related note, some Christians believe we are supposed to heal the sick, cast out demons, and perform signs and wonders. They believe the Christian life should be defined by preaching the truth and performing miracles.

Should Christians preach the truth? Absolutely!

Should Christians be able to heal the sick, cast out demons, and perform miracles? Absolutely!

Is this what it means to obey Jesus? No.

Jesus said, "Not all those who say to me 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. On that day many people will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and did many mighty works in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who practice lawlessness.'"²⁰

Not everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do what God wants will enter heaven. On judgment day, there will be many people who will think that they will enter the kingdom of heaven because they prophesied, cast out demons, and performed signs and wonders. But Jesus will tell them to leave.

The obvious implication is that healing the sick, casting out demons, and performing signs and wonders is still not, in and of itself, what it means to do what God wants. If you preach and heal and cast out demons, but don't do what God wants, you still won't be allowed to enter. Something is still missing. God wants us doing something else.

What is it?

Serving in Church

Christians often think we should be "serving" in the local church. For example, people will serve in children's ministry, or the sound team, or the greeting team, or in the parking crew, or many other similar ways. I used to be on the drama team at my old church.

But, here's the reality: When we do these things, all we're really doing is helping a religious meeting function properly. We're providing the means for the meeting to run smoothly. We need someone to watch the kids, so we have children's ministry. We need someone to teach the kids, so we get a drama team to teach through various skits. We need the pastor to be heard, so we have a sound team. We have many people coming in the door, and we want them to feel welcome, so we create a greeting team.

These are all just functions of a religious meeting. These same things happen in other religions, too. And, the Pharisees did the same things. They gathered together weekly, and they had people who

¹⁸ Ref. Matthew 7:15-23, 24:4-5; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, 11:13-15; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:14; Colossians 2:4-8; 1 Timothy 4:1-3, 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:16-18, 3:1-9, 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-22, 3:15-17; 1 John 2:4, 2:9; Jude 3-19

¹⁹ Ref. 2 Corinthians 11:13-14; Matthew 12:30; 2 John 9-11

²⁰ Matthew 7:21-23

were responsible for making sure those meetings functioned correctly.

What they did was no different than what Christians do today. Serving in the local church meeting is no different than what the Pharisees did in their synagogues to make sure the meeting functioned properly. It doesn't set us apart.

Trying to Not Sin and Accountability

Many Christians talk about *trying to not sin*. They know they shouldn't sin, they try to not sin, and they get help from others with their sin. They call it "accountability."

Yes – Christians shouldn't sin. That's taught very clearly throughout the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament emphasizes the fact that we shouldn't sin much stronger than I've ever heard at any Protestant Church:

"The works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, taking part in sexual sins, idolatry, doing witchcraft, hating, making trouble, being jealous, rage, being selfish, making people angry with each other, causing divisions among people, feeling envy, being drunk, having wild and wasteful parties, and doing other things like these. I warn you now as I warned you before: *Those who do these things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*"²¹

"But there must be no hint of sexual sin among you, or any kind of impurity or greed. Those things are not right for God's holy people. Also, there must be no evil talk among you, and you must not speak foolishly or tell evil jokes. These things are out of character. Instead, you should be giving thanks to God. For you can be sure of this: *No one will have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God who sins sexually, or does evil things, or is greedy.* Anyone who is greedy is serving a false god."²²

"Everyone who wants to belong to the Lord must turn away from wickedness."²³

These are just a few examples. The New Testament doesn't just teach that Christians should, in general, try to not sin. No – it is much stronger than that. Paul wrote to Christians, warning them that no one who does these things will inherit the kingdom of God. He was warning them that these sins must come to an end – not just decrease.

Hebrews warns that if someone deliberately continues sinning, they will face a terrifying judgment.²⁴ And John wrote, "Anyone who continues to sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's work. All who are God's children do not continue sinning, because God's seed abides in them. They are not able to go on sinning, because they have become children of God."²⁵

Repeatedly, Scripture teaches that if you continue sinning, you will not enter the kingdom of God. So, already, Scripture holds a higher standard than what is preached in most Protestant churches. The Protestant Church teaches that, in general, you shouldn't sin, but if you do sin, you need to remember that you have forgiveness.

Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Church, went so far as to encourage Christians to sin in order to prove that they really believe they're forgiven. He not only said, "it's okay if you happen to sin," but he told Christians to sin on purpose to prove their faith. He took his own false gospel to its logical end: if you can be saved entirely independent from works, then it doesn't matter if you obey God or not – you should feel free to sin. Many Christians would argue that the Protestant Gospel does not support this belief – but Martin Luther himself understood it does. He encouraged Christians to sin on purpose. He encouraged them to have so much faith in their forgiveness that they

²¹ Galatians 5:19-21, emphasis added

²² Ephesians 5:3-5, emphasis added

²³ 2 Timothy 2:19

²⁴ Ref. Hebrews 10:26-31

²⁵ 1 John 3:8-9

willingly sin to prove how much they believe.²⁶

That's not what Scripture teaches. Scripture teaches that you must turn from sin – you must repent.

However, there are also those in the Church who teach people to turn from sin. They teach that Christians should no longer do the sinful things Paul mentioned. They teach that true Christians won't continue living in sin. But they still miss the point. They don't teach true repentance.

Repentance is not just “stop sinning.”

No – the Pharisees prided themselves on the fact that they didn't commit adultery, they didn't commit immorality, they didn't break God's Law. They were very good at not doing the things God said not to do. They were proud of the fact that they were really good at not breaking those laws.

Repentance is not just about *not* doing the things God said *not* to do. That is what many Christians miss today. Some Christians teach that true Christians don't continue living in sin – but if they leave it at that, they're not teaching the whole message of repentance!

If you completely stop sinning – you completely stop doing the things God said not to do – but you don't start doing the things God said you should be doing, then you haven't repented. (In fact, you probably just don't understand how you *are* still doing the things God said not to do. You don't understand what it means when it says, “don't love yourself,” or, “don't love money.” You think you don't love money because you use the world's standards – not God's standards. You think you don't love yourself because you use the world's standards – not God's standards.)

If you stop doing one thing, but you never start doing something else, then you haven't repented – and you're still no different than the Pharisees. The Pharisees tried hard to not sin – but they weren't doing what God wanted them to be doing. They never repented.

Here's our list again:

- ~~Going to church on Sunday~~
- ~~Reading the Bible in the mornings~~
- ~~Praying~~
- ~~Singing worship songs on Sunday, or on my own~~
- ~~Getting together with Christian friends to talk about God and the Bible (“fellowship”)~~
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- ~~Memorizing Bible verses~~
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- ~~Serving in my church in some way (children's ministry, the sound team, the drama team, the greeting team, etc...)~~
- ~~Talking to unbelievers about Jesus (“evangelizing”)~~

These are the things Christians think should separate us from unbelievers. Yet, none of these things separate us from the Pharisees or Ancient Israel in the Old Testament. There is nothing about what we think the Christian life should look like that is any different than the people judged guilty by God!

Christians think, “Well, we believe in Jesus!”

But the Bible doesn't teach that you're saved by *believing* in Jesus. The Bible teaches that you're

²⁶ Ref. Martin Luther, Letter to Jerome Weller, July 1530

saved by fidelity. You're saved by both believing and obeying! You're saved by loyalty and reliability.

We can't look at our lives and think that we can live exactly like the Pharisees as long as we believe in Jesus. The Bible teaches that we must change the way we're living – our lives must look different. We don't just stop doing the bad things, we must start doing what God wants us to be doing. We must obey.

So, we need to understand what we should be doing. We need to know what God wants our lives to look like. We can see that what we typically think the Christian life should look like is no different than the Pharisees or Ancient Israel. God judged them guilty because they didn't obey his commands. If our lives look identical to theirs, he will say the same thing about us!

Our Church culture tells us that this is what it means to be a Christian. Our Church culture tells us that this is what the Christian life should look like. But the Bible warns us that the Church culture is going to become apostate. The Bible warns us that Christians will be deceived. The Bible warns us not to compare ourselves to those around us. So, if we define what it means to be a Christian by our Church culture, we will end up being one of the people the Bible warns us about. We will be deceived. We will be led into destruction.

Our Church culture travels across land and sea to make one convert. But they make that convert twice as fit for hell as they are. You don't want to be that convert. You don't want to become twice as fit for hell because you followed the traditions of men, teachings of men, and human rules.

The Church has become a bunch of Pharisees. The Church follows human traditions and ignores the commands of God.

The Pharisees believed they were serving God. They believed they were God's people. They thought God was their Father. They remembered all that God had done for Israel. Just like them, the Church has fallen away. They still think they're God's people. They still call God their Father. They remember everything God did in the first century when the apostles were still alive. But the Church today is no closer to God than the Pharisees were.

The Christian life has become defined by church meetings, prayer meetings and Bible studies. They're not obeying the commands of God. In fact, they're taught in the Protestant Church that they don't *need* to obey the commands of God – that they're saved by faith alone, without works!

The modern definition of what it means to be a Christian is wrong. This means that everyone living beneath that definition is not really a Christian – even though they think they are. The warning of the apostles has proven to be true! People are deceived! People think they're Christians when they're not! People think they know God when they don't! The Church has done exactly what the Pharisees did! The Church has done exactly what was foretold by Jesus and the apostles!

Christians must stop defending the apostate Church – the false Church. They must stop treating it like the holy Temple of God when it's not.

Only those who obey Jesus are saved.

Only those who obey the commands of God are saved.

Jesus said, "Everyone who hears my words and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. It rained hard, the floods came, and the winds blew and hit that house. But it did not collapse, because it was built on rock. Everyone who hears my words and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. It rained hard, the floods came, and the winds blew and hit that house, and it collapsed with a big crash."²⁷

We mentioned this parable earlier in this series. The thing to keep remembering is that Jesus did not distinguish between what we think of as "Christians" and "Unbelievers." No – Jesus was distinguishing between two people who both had his commands. They both read his words, they both heard his message. The only difference between them was whether they obeyed his commands or not.

²⁷ Matthew 7:24-27

Ep. 8 – Lies Christians Believe About The Christian Life

The wise man was not the man who had the Bible, read the Bible, went to church on Sundays and listened to sermons. The wise man was the man who obeyed what he read, and the foolish man was the man who did not obey what he read.

John said, “We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands. Anyone who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if someone obeys his word, then in that person God’s love has truly reached its goal. This is how we can be sure we are in him: Whoever says that he abides in him must live as Jesus lived.”²⁸

“The world and its desires are passing away, but the person who does what God wants lives forever.”²⁹

“And God gives us what we ask for because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.”³⁰

“The people who obey God’s commands abide in God, and God abides in them.”³¹

“Loving God means obeying his commands. And God’s commands are not too burdensome for us.”³²

John was clear: Obedience to God is what distinguishes those who know him from those who don’t know him. We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands. Those who abide in God are the ones who obey his commands. Those who have eternal life are those who do what God wants.

As Christians, we know that we’ve been adopted by God and can call him, “Father.”³³ That means we’re in his family. We are brothers and sisters with Jesus himself. We are co-heirs with Christ.³⁴

But Jesus didn’t say, “Everyone who believes in me is my brother or my sister.”

No, he said, “My mother and my brothers and sisters are those who listen to God’s teaching and obey it!”³⁵

Jesus’ family are those who hear God’s teaching and obey it. Only those who obey God are adopted by God. Only those who obey his commands can call him, “Father.” This is the consistent message in Scripture. This is what Jesus taught. This is what Paul taught. This is what John taught. This is what James taught.

A Christian is only a true Christian if he or she obeys the commands of God. Anyone who calls Jesus, “Lord,” but doesn’t obey his commands will be turned away on judgment day.³⁶

This brings us to an important question:

What are the commands of God?

The Pharisees and Ancient Israel did all the same things Christians do today. Their lives were identical to the modern Christian life. Yet God judged them guilty. He condemned them for rejecting his commands.

Obviously, those things are not the commands of God.

So, what are they?

In the book of 1 John, the apostle John explained what it means to obey the commands of God:

²⁸ 1 John 2:3-6

²⁹ 1 John 2:17

³⁰ 1 John 3:22

³¹ 1 John 3:24

³² 1 John 5:3

³³ Ref. Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-4:7

³⁴ Ref. Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26-4:7; Ephesians 3:6

³⁵ Luke 8:21

³⁶ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

“As for you be sure you abide in the teaching you heard from the beginning. If you abide in what you heard from the beginning, you will also abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise which he himself promised to us – eternal life.”³⁷

According to John, if you abide in “the teaching you heard from the beginning,” then you will abide in the Son and in the Father.

John also said, “The people who obey God’s commands abide in God, and God abides in them.”³⁸

So, the logical conclusion is that *obeying God’s commands* means abiding in “the teaching you have heard from the beginning.” If you abide in this “teaching,” you are obeying the commands of God.

Which teaching?

The teaching you have heard from the beginning.

What is that?

John told us:

“This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other.”³⁹

The “teaching you have heard from the beginning” is that we must love one another. That is what it means to obey the commands of God. That is the life God is looking for. That is what the Pharisees failed to do. That is what Ancient Israel failed to do. That is what the true Christian life is all about. Those who love one another abide in the Son and in the Father. They have eternal life. They are the true Christians. This is the message John taught all throughout 1 John.⁴⁰

This shouldn’t come as a surprise. Jesus repeatedly said that all of the Law and the prophets are summed up in love.⁴¹ He was saying that the entire Old Testament is summed up in love – loving God, and loving one another. Paul also said the same thing.⁴²

All of the Old Testament is summed up in love. Furthermore, the New Testament is also summed up in love. Paul clarified the purpose of the apostles’ instructions: “*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.”⁴³

Both the Old and New Testaments are summed up in love, which is why John said, “This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other.” This is what God wanted from the very beginning. God has always wanted his people to be defined by true love – both in Ancient Israel, as well as in the Church.

This is why Jesus said, “This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you.”⁴⁴ And he said again, “This is my command: Love each other.”⁴⁵

Jesus’ command is that we love one another. John said that loving one another is what separates true Christians from false Christians. Paul said the purpose of the apostles’ instructions was that Christians would all love one another. So, the thing that is supposed to set us apart is love. Love is what will separate us from the Pharisees, Ancient Israel, and the world.

³⁷ 1 John 2:24-25

³⁸ 1 John 3:24

³⁹ 1 John 3:11

⁴⁰ Ref. 1 John 2:9-10, 3:10, 3:14-18, 3:23, 4:7-12, 4:16, 4:19-21, 5:1-3

⁴¹ Ref. Matthew 7:12, 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-34

⁴² Ref. Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-14

⁴³ 1 Timothy 1:5-7 (EXB; italics NLT)

⁴⁴ John 15:12

⁴⁵ John 15:17

We must love one another.

Love is what should define the Christian life. Love is what every Christian is called to. It's not enough to just "not sin." True repentance is when you stop sinning, and you start loving.

That was the message of John the Baptist. He explained repentance as, "if you have two shirts, share with the person who does not have one. If you have food, share that also."⁴⁶

The message of the Bible is that we must be faithful to God's Anointed One – Jesus. We must be loyal to him. We must keep fidelity. We must be reliable. Being faithful to him means we obey his commands – and his commands are to love one another.

That is what the true Christian life is all about. This is what will separate those who enter the kingdom of heaven from those who merely call Jesus "Lord," but are turned away.⁴⁷

But there's still a problem.

Remember when one of the Scribes asked Jesus which command is the greatest? Jesus answered that the greatest commands are to love God and love one another⁴⁸ – exactly as we've just discussed.

But the conversation didn't end there...

"The man answered, 'That was a good answer, Teacher. You were right when you said God is one and there is no other God besides him. One must love God with all his heart, all his mind, and all his strength. And one must love his neighbor as he loves himself. These commands are more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices we offer to God.'⁴⁹

Do you see the problem?

When Jesus told the Pharisees that the entire Old Testament is summed up in love, it wasn't new information to them. They already knew it was summed up in love. They read the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets, and they understood that the point of the whole thing was that we should all love – love God, and love one another.

Most Christians today don't understand how the Old Testament is summed up in love – especially the Law of Moses. It seems harsh. It seems strict. It seems like the furthest thing from love. They know Jesus said it is summed up in love, so they trust that it must be true. But most Christians can't see it.

But the Pharisees could see it.

They understood that it was all about love.

The Pharisees understood better than most Christians today.

But they still failed.

They still got it wrong.

Do you see the problem now?

If the Pharisees understood that the Law and the prophets were summed up in love, but they still got it wrong, what chance do Christians have, who don't even understand how the Law and prophets are summed up in love? The Pharisees knew the information, and still got it wrong. Most Christians don't even know the information!

Knowing that love is the point of Scripture doesn't mean you love others. Knowing that God wants you to love others doesn't mean you understand what that even means.

Christians think they know what it means to love. They think they understand what it means

⁴⁶ Luke 3:11

⁴⁷ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23, 25:31-46

⁴⁸ Ref. Mark 12:28-31

⁴⁹ Mark 12:32-33

when the Bible tells them to love one another. They think they know what love is.

But, just like *faith*, and just like *repentance*, Christians are using the wrong definitions. Just like the Church defines the Christian life by comparing itself to the world around them, they do the same thing with *love*. Most Christians know that Scripture teaches that we should love one another. Most Christians know that the Law and the prophets are summed up in love. Again, this is no different than the Pharisees.

The problem is that Christians accept the world's definition of love.

Christians approach the Bible without allowing Scripture to define its own terms. They read the word *repentance*, and they think it means feeling bad about sin and confessing it. But it actually means you change your lifestyle: You stop doing what you were doing, and you start doing something else. Christians read the word *faith*, and they think they understand what it means because they bring their own definition. But it doesn't mean merely *believing* and *trusting*. It means fidelity, loyalty, faithfulness, and reliability.

The same is true with *love*.

Christians see that the Bible teaches that we should love one another. But they just assume they know what it means to love. They never let the Bible teach them what *love* means. They accept the world's definition of *love*.

If we use the world's definition of *love*, the Bible doesn't make sense. Consider what John said: "Everyone who loves has become God's child and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."⁵⁰

"God is love. Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."⁵¹

According to John, it's not possible to love one another unless you know God. No one can love unless they have become a child of God. If we're using the world's definition of love, that doesn't make any sense! That would mean that people in the world who aren't even Christians have become children of God – because they love others! They love with the world's definition of love!

Furthermore, Jesus said, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as it loves its own."⁵² According to John, everyone who loves has become God's child. But according to Jesus (in John's gospel account nonetheless), even the world loves its own.

How can both these statements be true if *love* means the same thing in both verses? John must have been referring to something different. He must have meant that a Christian's love would be different than the world's love.

Obviously, the Bible was not referring to the same kind of love any unbeliever could have!

We need to understand God's definition of *love*.

The Bible defines its terms. It teaches us what true love is. But most Christians go through life, thinking they love others, when they don't. Just like the Pharisees, they know they're supposed to love, but they don't realize that they don't even know what that means. They don't love with the kind of love the Bible commands us to have. They don't love according to God's definition of *love*. Therefore, they're not obeying the commands of God, which means they're not true Christians.

Jesus didn't only tell us to love one another. He said, "You must love one another as I have loved you."⁵³

We are commanded to love as Jesus loved us. That means we are commanded to love with the same kind of love Jesus demonstrated for us. It is a very different kind of love than the world's

⁵⁰ 1 John 4:7-8

⁵¹ 1 John 4:16

⁵² John 15:19

⁵³ John 13:34

definition of *love*.

So, in our next video, we will look at what it means to love one another. What is biblical love?

Christians must stop assuming they know things. They must stop coming to Scripture assuming they already understand some of what it teaches. Our human definition of *love* is nowhere near what God wants. So, when we only love with our human definition of *love*, we're not obeying God. This means we don't abide in God, we're not obeying the teaching that was taught from the beginning, we don't know God, we don't have life, we're not children of God, and we're not saved.

It doesn't matter if you go to Church. It doesn't matter if you read the Bible. It doesn't matter if you listen to sermons. It doesn't matter if you pray. It doesn't matter if you worship. It doesn't matter if you tithe. It doesn't matter if you go on missions trips. It doesn't matter if you try to stop sinning – or even if you've convinced yourself that you have stopped sinning. It doesn't matter if you evangelize. It doesn't matter if you pray for the sick, cast out demons, and perform signs and wonders. If you're not obeying the commands of God, you are not a Christian.

Scripture tells us what the commands of God are. It's not subjective. It's not something we can just make up. Scripture tells us what God wants. It tells us what his commands are. It tells us that we must love one another.

And it tells us what true love is...