

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 23 – Jesus vs. Paul? Do We Judge the Church or Not?

Throughout this series, we've been talking about what real Christianity is according to the Bible, and how modern Christianity does not look at all like what the Bible says true Christianity is.

It's important that we know what real Christianity is. Christians need to know what real Christians look like, and what they don't look like. They need to be able to identify true Christianity from false Christianity. They need to be able to recognize if the Church around them is alive or dead.

It's important that we know what Jesus and the apostles said real Christianity is. It's important because we need to know if we're really followers of Jesus or not. We don't want to be people who are deceived. We don't want to be people who think we love Jesus, only to hear him tell us that he never knew us.¹ We don't want to find out when it's too late that we were never God's children. The Bible warns us that it's possible to be deceived.²

Peter said, "My brothers and sisters, make every effort to be certain that you really are called and chosen by God."³

Peter told us to make every effort to be sure that we really are God's children. Why? Because it's possible to think you're called and chosen by God when you aren't. He was telling us to take this seriously. He was telling us to not wait until judgment day to find out for sure. If you just accept what you've always been told by the Church, even though the Bible tells you outright that the Church is going to be full of false teachers and people will be deceived,⁴ are you making every effort to be certain that you really are called and chosen by God? If you just accept what they say despite all the warnings, are you really trying hard? Are you doing what Peter told you to do?

Protestants teach that you can have assurance of salvation as long as you're sure you believe the information is true. Protestants think they're doing what Peter said to do when they test themselves against their own theology – theology they received from men. They think they're examining themselves against Scripture when they examine themselves against what people have told them Scripture says.

Protestants teach that you can be sure that you know God if you believe in the Gospel, accept Jesus into your heart, and trust in him for salvation. They say that as long as you believe all of the correct information, you can have assurance of salvation.

Many people think they've made every effort to be certain that they're called and chosen by God because they've asked themselves, "Do I really believe in the gospel? Do I trust in Jesus for my salvation?" When they decide that, yes, they do believe, and yes, they do trust, they find themselves sure that they do truly know God.

But that's not what the Bible says. That's just what men have told us the Bible says. And people think it's what the Bible says because they read the Bible through the lens of what they were taught.

¹ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

² Ref. Romans 16:18; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4; Ephesians 5:6-7; Colossians 2:4, 2:8; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2

³ 2 Peter 1:10

⁴ Ref. Acts 20:29-31; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-22, 3:16-17; 2 John 7-8; Jude 1-19

They didn't start with the Bible. The Bible told us how we can be sure. It told us how we can have assurance of our own salvation:

John said, "We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands."⁵

Peter told us to make every effort to be certain that we are called and chosen by God. John told us how: If we obey God's commands, we can be sure that we know God.

If you want assurance of salvation, you must look at more than just what you believe, think, and feel. You must look at your actions. Is your life defined by the things God said it should be defined by? Does your life match Scripture? Or does your life only match the lifestyle of the Christians around you? The Bible tells us the Church will fall away. That means our lives must match Scripture – even when it doesn't match all the Christians around us.

John told us how to be sure that we know God. By telling us this, he also told us how to recognize true Christianity from false Christianity. We should not only know whether or not *we* know God – we should be able to know whether *those around us* know him, too.

Throughout the entire New Testament, Jesus and the apostles warned us that the Church would fall away.⁶ They warned us that Christians would be deceived. They warned us that the Church would be full of people who think they know God, but they don't obey his commands.

Just like Moses warned Israel that they would rebel against God and become apostate,⁷ the Church was also warned. And, just like Israel thought they hadn't rebelled against God or become apostate because they still worshiped him, celebrated the feasts, brought sacrifices to God, kept the Sabbath, met together, raised their arms in prayer, sought God, delighted in God, drew near to God, fasted, bowed their heads to God, read Scripture, prophesied, listened to prophesy, and anticipated the day of the Lord,⁸ so too, the Church thinks they haven't rebelled against God because they do all those same things.

Quite frankly, the biblical description of apostasy is the modern description of the Church.

This might upset some people. It might offend some people. But it shouldn't surprise us. Jesus and all the apostles warned us that Christianity would become apostate. It's the single biggest warning found throughout the New Testament – it's not a warning you can just ignore!

Yet most Christians ignore it. They don't pay attention to it. They don't give any thought to it. So, they don't recognize that the apostasy has already happened, and they join the apostasy. They don't think about the fact that the Bible says the Church is going to become apostate!

The implication of the Church becoming apostate is that you can't just assume that the Christianity around you is true Christianity. It's not the biggest warning in the New Testament for no reason; it's not something you can just ignore. You are a fool if you just ignore it.

Christians must understand the full picture of what the apostles prophesied, they must understand how they should view the Church today, and they must know how to respond.

The New Testament didn't just tell us *that* the Church would become apostate. It told us *when* it happened: Paul dealt with false believers all throughout his lifetime. But he warned us that the apostasy would significantly increase after his death.

He said, "I know that after I am gone, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even some from your own group will rise up and twist the truth and will lead away

⁵ 1 John 2:3

⁶ Ref. Matthew 7:15-23, 13:18-30, 13:36-43, 24:4-5, 24:11; Mark 4:13-20, 13:5-6, 13:21-23; Luke 6:26, 21:8; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2

⁷ Ref. Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28:15-68, 29:16-29, 30:1-10, 31:16-22, 31:29

⁸ Ref. Isaiah 1:11-15, 58:1-5; Jeremiah 8:8-9, 12:2, 14:14-16, 18:18, 19:14-20:6, 21:1-4, 23:16-23, 23:25-32, 26:7-9, 27:14-15, 28:1-17, 36:6, 36:9, 37:17; Ezekiel 20:1-3, 33:30-33; Hosea 5:6-7, 8:1-3, 8:12-13; Amos 5:14, 5:18-23; Micah 3:11-12; Malachi 1:6-14

followers after them. So be careful!”⁹

Paul warned us that something big was coming, and it was going to happen after his death. Paul said that after he died, wolves would come in, twist the truth and lead away followers after them. He said to be careful. All throughout his letters in the New Testament, he warned us that a huge apostasy was coming, but here he said it was coming after he was gone – meaning, after his death. He warned that after his death, the apostasy he had written about would come. It would be big. It would be a massive falling away – like nothing they had yet encountered. The number of false believers throughout Paul’s lifetime wouldn’t compare to what was coming.

Peter also wrote similar warnings shortly before his death. 2 Peter 2 is an entire chapter warning us about the apostasy that would soon fill the Church. He warned about false teachers, he warned about masses of people being deceived, he warned about lawlessness, he warned that people would call themselves Christians yet live unrepentant lives, and he warned that they would teach others that it is okay to live that kind of life. Peter wrote this warning shortly before he and Paul were both killed in Rome.

Peter and Paul both died around the same time – in the mid-to-late 60’s of the first century. Again, Paul had said that this apostasy was coming, and he said it would begin after his death.

In the book of Jude, we can see Paul’s warning coming to life.

The book of Jude was written within (at most) just a few years after Paul died. Jude began his letter saying, “Dear friends, I was just about to write you about our common salvation. But I felt the need to write you about something else: I want to urge you to defend the faith that was given to the holy people of God once and for all time. For some people have wormed their way into your group. Long ago the prophets wrote about these people who will be judged guilty. They are against God and have distorted the grace of our God into immorality.”¹⁰

The entire remainder of his letter was about false believers. The entire book warns us to not be deceived by the false Christians all around us.

So, look at the timeline – Paul said the apostasy was going to happen after his death. Then, within just a few short years after his death, Jude wrote a letter. In his letter, he said he was originally going to write about something else, but he changed what he was going to write about because he felt the need to address a bigger issue. That issue? Apostasy.

Jude wrote his letter because something big had just happened in the Church. His entire letter is about false believers – people in the Church, calling themselves Christians, yet refusing to obey the commands of God. He described them as, “...dirty spots in your fellowship meals. They eat with you and have no fear, caring only for themselves.”¹¹

The book of Jude shows us what was happening shortly after Paul’s death. Something big had just happened. The apostasy that Paul and Peter warned about had suddenly arrived. It was so sudden that Jude changed what he was writing about because it became such an urgent issue. And he reminded his readers that the apostles told them this was coming:

“Dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ prophesied. They said to you, ‘In the last times there will be people who laugh about God, pursuing their own evil desires.’ These are the people who divide you, people whose thoughts are only of this world, who do not have the Spirit.”¹²

Jude was saying, “Guys, don’t forget that you were warned about this! You were warned by all the apostles that this was coming!” That’s what we see in the rest of Scripture – we see warning after

⁹ Acts 20:29-31

¹⁰ Jude 3-4

¹¹ Jude 12

¹² Jude 17-19

warning after warning that apostasy was coming. Jude was telling the people to remember their warnings. He was telling them the apostasy had arrived. He reminded them that the apostles had prophesied that it would happen. He warned them to not be led astray – to not give in – to not become one of those apostate believers. He warned them to not be deceived, and to remember that the apostles had told them this would happen.

He wanted Christians to do what the Israelites had failed to do in the Old Testament: He wanted them to take their warnings seriously. He wanted them to take the warnings to heart. He wanted them to not allow themselves to become deceived as apostasy swept through the Church.

Jude is not our only indication that something major changed shortly after Paul and Peter (and many of the other apostles) died. The letter we know as *1 John* was written by the apostle John to address apostasy. He wrote it roughly ten to twenty years after Paul and Peter died. His entire letter was written to tell Christians how to recognize true Christians from false Christians, and how to avoid falling into apostasy themselves.

He said, “My dear children, these are the last days. You have heard that the antichrist is coming, and now many antichrists are already here. This is how we know that these are the last days. These enemies of Christ were in our fellowship, but they left us. They never really belonged to us; for if they had been a part of us, they would have remained with us. But they left, and this shows that none of them really belonged to us.”¹³

Remember what Paul warned us about: He said after his death wolves would come in and attack the flock. He said people who were in the Church would rise up and lead others away. Here, within twenty years of Paul’s death, John said this had already happened. People who were part of the Church had risen up. They had led people away. John called them “antichrists.” He proceeded to warn us that these antichrists are trying to deceive us. They’re teaching lies. They’re leading people astray. He said, “I am writing these things about those people who are deceiving you.”¹⁴

The rest of John’s letter teaches us how to recognize true Christians from false Christians.

Paul said the apostasy would happen after his death. Shortly after his death, Jude felt an urgent need to write about false Christians in the Church. Shortly after that, John wrote about how people had fallen away from the truth, were deceiving others, and were leading people astray.

The apostasy happened right when Paul said it would happen – shortly after his death.

The apostles all warned us that it was coming. They warned us that it wouldn’t just be a few people here and there... it would be big. Paul told us that the times would be terrible because the Church would be defined by apostasy rather than by true love.¹⁵

When we look at the Church today, we need to recognize that this is what we’re dealing with.

We don’t have the same Church we see in Acts. We don’t have the same Church we see in Paul’s letters. Something changed. People stopped following the truth. They stopped obeying the commands of God. Just like Israel in the Old Testament, the Church today is full of people who come to God, sing songs to God, pray, raise their arms, bow their heads, fast, draw near to God, have holy meetings, and read Scripture. Just like Israel in the Old Testament, Christians today think they know God. They claim God is with them. They prophesy in his name. They say they know God.

But they don’t obey his radical commands that would cost them everything important to them. That’s what apostasy looks like.

Throughout this series, we’ve been looking at *how* this apostasy happened. We’ve talked about how the Church has replaced biblical teaching with human tradition. We’ve seen how Christians have brought their own definitions and redefined what Scripture teaches by using their own definitions

¹³ 1 John 2:18-19

¹⁴ 1 John 2:26

¹⁵ Ref. 2 Timothy 3:1-9

instead of biblical definitions. The Bible warned us that many people who think they are Christians will be deceived. They will follow false teachers. They will be led into destruction. They will expect to hear Jesus say, “well done, good and faithful servant,”¹⁶ but they will end up hearing, “I never knew you. Depart from me.”¹⁷

Since the Bible warned us that the Church would become apostate and many Christians would be deceived, it’s important that we understand the difference between *true* Christianity and *apostate* Christianity. It’s also important that we recognize the biblical implications of apostasy.

As Peter said, it’s important that we make every effort to have assurance of our own salvation. But it’s not just about our own salvation. The Bible also says that it’s important that we recognize the difference between *true* brothers and sisters and *false* brothers and sisters. It’s important that we know how to recognize who is truly following Jesus, and who is apostate.

A lot of Christians, even after recognizing that something is wrong with the Church today, still think that anyone who calls themselves a Christian and believes in Jesus is, in fact, a Christian.

But that’s not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches us what true Christianity looks like. It tells us that it’s a radical lifestyle. It costs everything. It changes everything. It re-prioritizes everything. It also teaches that anything short of this is not Christianity at all – those people are deceived, they’re headed toward destruction, they’re following the antichrist. They’re dead.

Jesus called the church in Sardis *dead*.¹⁸ He told them that if they didn’t change, he would come as a thief in the night against them. By saying this, Jesus was telling them that they weren’t actually Christians at all. This is because, as we’ve been discussing throughout this series, true Christianity changes the way you live.¹⁹ True Christianity is about whether or not you obey Jesus. It’s about doing the things Jesus directly said to do. It’s about living like the early Church in Acts.²⁰ True Christianity is about action – not merely belief.

Therefore, if someone doesn’t have the correct actions, they’re not really a Christian – even if they say they are, and even if they think they are. Jesus said, “Beware of false prophets. They come to you disguised like sheep, but they are really dangerous like wolves. You will know these people by their fruit. Grapes don’t come from thorn bushes, and figs don’t come from thorny weeds. In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. Every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. In the same way, you will know them by their fruit. Not all who say to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.”²¹

In this passage, Jesus was saying that you can know whether a person is a sheep or a wolf based on their fruit – whether or not they do what God wants. He said you can know whether a person is a good tree or a bad tree based on their fruit – whether they obey God or not.

Most Christians today think Jesus was lying.

Obviously, they wouldn’t put it in those words... but they prove it’s true because they’re incapable of identifying true Christians from false Christians. They think it’s impossible to identify someone by their fruit! They think the only way to identify a true Christian from a non-Christian is based on whether or not that person calls themselves a Christian. Furthermore, they think that

¹⁶ Ref. Matthew 25:21,23

¹⁷ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

¹⁸ Ref. Revelation 3:1-3

¹⁹ Ref. 2 Corinthians 5:15; 1 John 2:3, 3:6, 3:9, 4:7-16, 4:19, 5:18

²⁰ Ref. Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35

²¹ Matthew 7:15-21

everyone who says they believe in Jesus is truly a Christian. Why? Because they've accepted a gospel that says you're saved by believing the information is true – not by obeying it. They've accepted a Christianity that says it's all about what you think and believe – not about what you do and whether or not you obey.

Christians look at themselves and all the other false Christians around them, they see a lot of bad fruit mixed in with what they *think* is good fruit, and they reject what Jesus said.

Jesus said a good tree cannot have bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot have good fruit. “Obviously, Jesus was wrong. Good trees are bearing some bad fruit. Jesus said they would bear *no* bad fruit. But clearly when he said ‘no bad fruit,’ what he meant was, ‘slightly less than others.’”

By redefining what Christianity is, Christians have made it impossible for themselves to identify a tree by its fruit. When they read this passage, they choose their own theology, and their own idea about what it means to be a Christian, over what Jesus actually said. They reject what Jesus said for the sake of their own doctrines and theologies.²² In order for the Church to grow into maturity, Christians need to start recognizing the difference between those who *say* they love God and those who *do* love God.

“If you love me, you will obey my commands... Those who have my commands and obey them are the ones who love me... If people love me, they will obey my teaching.”²³ “Loving God means obeying his commands.”²⁴

For the Church to grow into maturity, Christians need to stop thinking of apostate Christianity as a real, viable option. This means they also need to stop thinking of apostate Christians as real, true brothers and sisters. The Bible told us what real Christians look like. It told us what the fruit should be, and how to recognize true believers from false believers.

Christians need to start accepting the Bible's definitions.

Jesus told us that we can identify who is truly a Christian and who is not based on the fruit in their lives. Why? Because those who truly love him will obey him. And only those who obey him actually love him. Therefore, if someone is not obeying his commands – his radical, extreme, costly commands – then that person isn't really a Christian, even if they think they are.

Ancient Israel thought they followed God, but they were apostate. The Pharisees thought they diligently served God, but they were hypocrites. The church in Sardis thought they were alive, but they were dead. The New Testament warned us that the Church as a whole will be deceived – thinking they're on the narrow road to life, but really being on the broad road to destruction.²⁵

Only those who obey Jesus actually love him. Not everyone who calls themselves a Christian is truly a Christian. Or, as John said when he was addressing the apostasy of the Church, “So if we say we have fellowship with God, but we continue living in darkness, we are liars and do not follow the truth.”²⁶

“Anyone who says, ‘I know God,’ but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”²⁷

“Anyone who claims, ‘I am in the light,’ but hates a brother or sister, is still in the darkness.”²⁸

“If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you.”²⁹

“Those who do not practice righteousness are not God's children, and those who do not love

²² Ref. Matthew 15:3-9

²³ John 14:15,21,23

²⁴ 1 John 5:3

²⁵ Ref. Matthew 7:13-14

²⁶ 1 John 1:6

²⁷ 1 John 2:4

²⁸ 1 John 2:9

²⁹ 1 John 2:15

their brothers and sisters are not God's children."³⁰

"Whoever does not love is still dead."³¹

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."³²

"If people say, 'I love God,' but hate their brothers or sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen."³³

Repeatedly, John told us how to recognize true believers: It's not based on what they say, think, believe, or feel. It's based on what they do. Do they obey God's commands or not? Do they love – not with the world's love, but with the radical love of Jesus? John said you either love others radically with the extreme love of Jesus that completely forgets about yourself and only looks out for the good of others, or you hate. There is no in-between. If a Christian only loves with the same kind of love the world has for others, it's the same as hatred in God's eyes.

John was saying the same thing Jesus said: you can identify a tree by its fruit. If someone isn't obeying the commands of God, it doesn't matter if they *say* they love God. It doesn't matter if they *think* they love God. It doesn't matter if they feel strong affection for God. It doesn't matter if they believe all the information. It doesn't matter if they say they know God. It doesn't matter if they themselves are fully convinced that they're Christians. If they don't obey what God said to do, they're still dead, they're still in darkness, they don't follow the truth, they're not God's children, and they don't know God.

This is how we were told to identify true Christians from false Christians. This is how we recognize someone by their fruit.

True Christians must stop thinking that everyone else who calls themselves a Christian is truly a Christian. They must stop thinking that just because someone thinks they're doing something for the Lord, that it's what God wants.

However, it's also important that we recognize something else...

Every Christian who grew up in Church knows that we're not supposed to judge others. We all know that we need to be careful not to judge. We're all familiar with Jesus' words, "Don't judge others, and you will not be judged."³⁴

So, obviously, it's important that we don't judge others. We need to make sure that we go through life without judging other people. This is something that often comes up when we talk about recognizing fruit and knowing who's a Christian and who's not – the response is often, "Be careful not to judge!" And that's true! We must be careful not to judge.

But let me ask you: do you know what that verse means, or do you just assume you know what it means? Do you know what Jesus meant when he said *judge* or do you bring your own definitions and assume he was talking about the same thing you would be talking about if you said what he said?

Based on what you understand about this verse, would you say it's right or wrong to judge the Church?

Many Christians say, "Be careful not to judge the Church. You can't judge the Church." Is that what Jesus was saying? Was Jesus saying we shouldn't identify fruit? Was he saying we shouldn't look at someone's actions to determine if they're following the Lord? Most Christians are quick to look at this verse and say, "be careful not to judge the Church. You can't judge the Church..." but Paul actually said the complete opposite. He said it's our responsibility to judge the Church:

³⁰ 1 John 3:10

³¹ 1 John 3:14

³² 1 John 4:8

³³ 1 John 4:20

³⁴ Luke 6:37

“It is not my business to judge those who are *not* part of the church. God will judge them. But you *must* judge the people who *are* part of the church.”³⁵

You must judge the people who are part of the Church.

That’s what Paul said.

Christians tend to get one verse stuck in their head, and they don’t even understand it. What’s worse, they build their lives around it and teach it to others. As Paul said, “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.”³⁶

When Jesus told us not to judge others, he wasn’t saying that we shouldn’t evaluate fruit. He wasn’t saying we shouldn’t look at whether or not someone obeys God in order to know if they’re real Christians. And he wasn’t saying we shouldn’t judge the Church.

It’s our job to judge the Church.

I’ve heard pastors and many Christians talk about how we shouldn’t judge the Church because the Church is the bride of Christ – the Temple of God. They say that judging the Church is like trying to tear down the Temple of God. But here’s the problem: if the Church is apostate, then it’s not the Temple of God! If the Church is full of people who look like this world and don’t obey the commands of God, then, according to Scripture, they’re dead. And if they’re dead, they don’t have the Spirit living in them. If they don’t have the Spirit living in them, then they’re not the bride of Christ, and they’re not the Temple of God.

When Jude warned us about the false believers that were beginning to fill the Church, he said, “[They] do not have the Spirit.”³⁷

If they don’t have the Spirit, then how are they God’s Temple?

One Christian teacher has said that if you judge the Church, it would be the same as if you went to the Temple of Solomon, right after seeing God’s glory fill the inner sanctuary,³⁸ and you started hitting it with a sledge hammer to tear it down. But that’s not what we’re talking about, because we’re not talking about judging the Church during the time of the apostles when the Church was walking in the commands of God and filled with the Holy Spirit.

We’re talking about the Church during a time of apostasy. Or in other words, going back to the analogy of the Temple of Solomon, we’re not talking about the day God’s glory filled the inner sanctuary. We’re talking about the Temple during the time of the prophet Jeremiah.

During the time of the prophet Jeremiah, who were the people saying, “You cannot speak against the Temple of God”? Who were the people saying, “You’re attacking God’s Temple with your words!”?

It was the false prophets.³⁹ It was the apostate people. It was the ungodly priests.

Jeremiah, the prophet of God, was the one who was proverbially “taking a sledgehammer to the Temple of God.” He told the people that God was going to destroy the Temple and burn the entire city to the ground. The ones telling him to stop were the ones headed to destruction. They thought Jeremiah was blaspheming God’s Holy Temple by saying that the Temple would be torn down. They tried to kill him for saying it.

This is what Christians do today when they try to stop people who fear God from judging the Church. They think they’re defending God’s Temple, but they’re actually opposing God.

What ended up happening to Solomon’s Temple?

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, emphasis added

³⁶ 1 Timothy 1:7

³⁷ Jude 19

³⁸ Ref. 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, 7:1-3

³⁹ Ref. Jeremiah 26:6-9

It was torn down. It was burned to the ground. All the treasures and holy things in the Temple were carried off to Babylon and placed in the temples of false gods. Jerusalem was demolished. The entire land was left destroyed. The Old Testament referred to it as “the day of the Lord.”⁴⁰ Amos had warned them that they shouldn’t be looking forward to the day of the Lord, because it would be a day of darkness for them – not light. The people of Israel were convinced they served God. They were convinced they were alive. They were convinced they were defending God’s Temple. But God came against them suddenly – like a thief in the night.

God doesn’t live in the midst of an apostate people. He tells them, “I am not your God. And you are not my people.”⁴¹

When Christians say, “Don’t judge the Church,” and they treat the Church as if it’s still in the same condition that it was in when the apostles were leading it, they’re not defending God’s Temple. They’re doing what apostate people do when God tells them that he doesn’t live with them. If the Church today is rejecting the commands of God, living a life God hates, loving the world, thinking about themselves, loving money, and only giving God lip-service, then they’re dead. They’re apostate. They’re not the bride of Christ. They’re not the Temple of God.

Paul called them apostate.⁴² James called them adulterers.⁴³ Peter called them dirty spots and blemishes.⁴⁴ John called them the antichrist.⁴⁵ Jude called them twice dead.⁴⁶ Jesus called them wolves.⁴⁷ They were describing “Christians” when they said these things. Were they “taking a sledgehammer to the Temple of God” when they said these things?

The apostate Church is not the Church.

Paul said it’s our job to judge the Church. It’s not “attacking the Temple of God.” It’s not “speaking against the bride of Christ.” It’s our responsibility as people who love the Temple of God and love the bride of Christ.

Why? Why is it our job to judge the Church? Why is it our responsibility? When Paul said we must judge the Church, he explained why: “You know the saying, ‘Just a little leaven makes the whole batch of dough rise.’ Take out all the old leaven so that you will be a new batch of dough without leaven, which you really are.”⁴⁸

He then wrote about *how* we’re supposed to judge the Church (we’ll come back to this in the next video), and he concluded, “The Scripture says, ‘You must remove the evil person among you.’”⁴⁹

Why must we judge the Church?

We talked about leaven in an earlier video. Leaven is essentially yeast. You put it in bread dough, and it spreads through the whole thing, changing the entire batch of dough, causing it to rise. Paul was saying if you don’t judge the Church, apostasy will spread – it will spread through the whole thing just like leaven spreads through an entire batch of dough. You must get the leaven out. You must keep the dough from becoming leavened. You must not let it spread.

The reason we are supposed to judge the Church is so that the Church doesn’t become apostate. It’s to keep the Church pure. If we follow what Jesus taught, and recognize who are true Christians, and who are not, then we won’t begin to follow false brothers into apostasy.

⁴⁰ Ref. Joel 2:1-14; Amos 5:18-20

⁴¹ Ref. Hosea 1:9

⁴² Ref. 2 Thessalonians 2:3

⁴³ Ref. James 4:4

⁴⁴ Ref. 2 Peter 2:13

⁴⁵ Ref. 1 John 2:18-29

⁴⁶ Ref. Jude 12

⁴⁷ Matthew 7:15-20

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 5:6-7

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 5:13

Think of it this way:

Imagine you're on a narrow, difficult, painful road,⁵⁰ and you look to your side, and you see someone traveling in the same direction as you, but on a different road. Their road is easy. It's wide. It seems like it would be a much easier trip. They say they're going to the same place you're going. They say their destination is the same as yours. If you believe them, and you believe that their road will also take you to the same place, wouldn't you want to jump over to their road? Wouldn't you want to choose their path instead of the one you're on?

This is what has happened in the Church.

Christians don't want to judge the Church. They don't want to judge a tree by its fruit. They don't accept the gospel from Scripture – they accept a gospel that says you're saved by what you think and believe to be true. Then they see people who call themselves Christians – they get a good career, live a comfortable life, have a happy family, and enjoy all the things this life offers. They assume that those people are going to arrive at the same destination as them. Why? Because those people call themselves Christians and believe in Jesus. If you accept the wrong gospel, then you'll think those people are saved, too! And if they're going to arrive at the same destination, but they're going to have a much easier road to get there, then why wouldn't Christians jump over to their road?

The problem is that so many Christians don't realize that they've already jumped over. They're just accepting the standard they see around them, and they don't realize just how radical Jesus is. Paul corrected the Corinthians because they were still acting like normal, ordinary people.⁵¹ Unless you are living in a way that would cause people to think you're an alien to this world, you haven't arrived yet.

Christians don't accept what Jesus had to say about judging a tree by its fruit. They don't accept what John said about how to know for sure if someone else knows God. And the result is what we see all around us – everyone is choosing the easy road. Everyone believes the easy road results in the same destination, so everyone is choosing it.

The Bible is clear: Many will be deceived.

The warnings in Scripture are not that these people will have “less treasure” when they get to heaven. The warnings are that these people are headed to destruction. They're apostate. Paul said they tolerate people who preach a different Jesus, they receive a different spirit, and they accept a different gospel.⁵² In other words, they may say they believe in the gospel, they may say they believe in Jesus, and they may think they have the Spirit, but despite all this, they're not actually Christians.

If the gospel you believe is a different gospel than the one preached in the Bible, you're not saved. If you're trusting in Jesus – but it's a different Jesus than the true Jesus of Scripture, you're not saved. If you received a spirit, but it's a different spirit than the Spirit of God... whose temple are you?

If Christians never learn how to judge a tree by its fruit, they will never learn how to stop following these people into apostasy. If Christians keep thinking all roads lead to heaven as long as you believe in Jesus, then they'll typically choose the road that's most appealing to them.

Brothers and sisters, if you love God, you will obey God! And you need to start recognizing that if others actually love God, they will obey him, too. This means that all those people who think they're going to the same place as you... they are not. Not unless they are also obeying the radical commands of Jesus that cost us everything.⁵³

This is important to recognize because we need to stop allowing ourselves to accept their lifestyles. We need to choose the Kingdom even when they wouldn't. We need to shine as a light to

⁵⁰ Ref. Matthew 7:13-14

⁵¹ Ref. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

⁵² Ref. 2 Corinthians 11:4

⁵³ Luke 14:33

them – because they're lost, wandering in the darkness like sheep without a shepherd. We need to show them what it means to be alive and not let them influence us. We need to be an unleavened batch of dough, and not let their leaven get in and start to spread.

So, we are supposed to recognize true Christians from false Christians based on their fruit – that fruit being whether or not they do what God wants. As John said, “Anyone who says, ‘I know God,’ but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”⁵⁴

As we've seen throughout this series, the Church today looks almost identical to Israel during their apostasy. The Church today looks almost identical to the Pharisees during the time of Jesus.

When God judged ancient Israel, Babylon tore the city to the ground. Hundreds of thousands of Israelites died. The Temple was destroyed. The people were led away from the Promised Land into exile. When God judged Israel again shortly after Jesus, Rome burned the city to the ground. Millions of Israelites died. The Temple was destroyed again. The survivors were sold into slavery and led into exile. The Promised Land was left desolate for thousands of years.

If the description of the Church today perfectly matches the description of Israel right before God judged them with Babylon, or the description of the Pharisees right before God judged them with Rome, pause for a second... Think really hard about the implications of that.

What does that imply about the Church today?

The Israelites were called God's people, too.⁵⁵ They were called God's children.⁵⁶ Israel was the Kingdom of God. God had rescued them from slavery and brought them to the promised land. God led them through the wilderness. They held on to this history all the way through their apostasy, continuing to think that they were still God's children. The day before Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, the Israelites still thought God would never let his kingdom fall. They believed they were still his people. They didn't recognize that things had changed.

The Church today thinks the same way. They look at what happened in the early Church. They look at what Jesus did. They look at the apostles. And they assume that the descriptions of the Church in the Bible are the same descriptions of the Church today. They call themselves God's children. They call themselves God's people. But they're not recognizing that God also called Israel his children. He also called them his people. But when they stopped obeying him, he told them, “You are not my people.”⁵⁷ When they stopped obeying him, he told them that they were not his children.⁵⁸

In Romans, Paul wrote about how Israel stopped obeying God, and God cut them off. They were no longer his people; he was not their God. He rejected them.

Paul said, “It is as if some of the branches from an olive tree have been broken off. You Gentiles are like the branch of a wild olive tree that has been grafted to that first tree. You now share the rich root of the first tree. So do not consider yourselves superior to those branches that were broken off. If you brag, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.’ That is true. But those branches were broken off because they were unfaithful, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, then he will not spare you either. Notice that God is kind and also severe. He is severe toward those who stop following him. But God is kind to you, if you continue following in his kindness. If you do not, you will also be cut off from the tree. And if the Jews do not continue in unbelief, they will be grafted in. For God is able to graft them in again. If you Gentiles were cut off from a wild olive tree and, contrary to nature, grafted into a good olive tree,

⁵⁴ 1 John 2:4

⁵⁵ Ref. Jeremiah 3:1, 3:8; 31:31-32; Hosea 2:2-20; Isaiah 54:4-8

⁵⁶ Ref. Deuteronomy 14:1, 32:5-6; Jeremiah 3:14, 3:19, 3:22, 31:20

⁵⁷ Ref. Hosea 1:9

⁵⁸ Ref. John 8:39-47

how much more will these natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree again.”⁵⁹

In this section, Paul was talking about how Israel fell away from God. They were unfaithful to him. They didn’t have *pístis* – they didn’t have fidelity. And because of that, they were like branches cut off from a tree. The tree still stands – Israel (the Kingdom of God) still stands – but those who rejected God were cut off.

Paul gave a warning to us in the Church Age: If we don’t continue in God’s love, we will be cut off, too. If we are unfaithful, we will be cut off, too. That means that just like God told Israel, “You are not my people and I am not your God,”⁶⁰ if the Church does not continue in his love then he will also tell them, “You are not my people and I am not your God.”

His standards haven’t changed. He didn’t lower the bar for us. Just like Israel thought they were God’s people because they looked at all the amazing things God did for them, but they were wrong... the Church today looks at all the things God did in the early Church and they think they are still God’s people because they look at what God did back then. But if they are unfaithful, then they are branches that have been cut off. And just like the Jews, they don’t realize they’ve been cut off.

But anyone who repents and begins to walk in fidelity and faithfulness can be grafted back in, whether from the wild olive tree or from the good tree. This was a warning for us in the Church Age. If you are unfaithful, you will be cut off – it doesn’t matter if you think you’re a Christian or look at the history of the Church and think, “Wow, the Church is God’s people!” If the Church is unfaithful, they are branches that get cut off.

Anyone who is unfaithful gets cut off.

When we Jesus interacted with the people of Israel, we should recognize that his interactions with the Church today would be very similar, because the Church today looks just like they did. The people of Israel said to Jesus, “God is our Father; he is the only Father we have.”⁶¹

Isn’t that exactly what Christians today think and say? Christians assume that God is their Father because they assume they are his people. They look at what God did with the Church two thousand years ago, and they assume nothing has changed. The Israelites did the same thing. But Jesus replied to them, “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.”⁶²

They thought they were God’s children, but Jesus said they were actually children of the devil. Why?

Because they didn’t obey God’s commands. They inherited the devil’s nature – not God’s nature. They proved through their actions that they were children of the devil.

John said the same thing about Christians: “In this way it is apparent who God’s children are and who the devil’s children are: Those who do not practice righteousness are not God’s children, and those who do not love their brothers and sisters are not God’s children.”⁶³

According to both Jesus and John, God’s children are called “children of the devil” if they stop obeying God’s commands. It was true of Israel, and it is true of the Church.

John the Baptist told the people of Israel, “Do the things that prove your repentance. Don’t begin to say to yourselves, ‘Abraham is our father.’ For I tell you that God could raise up children for Abraham from these rocks. The ax is now ready to cut down the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Romans 11:17-24

⁶⁰ Ref. Hosea 1:9

⁶¹ John 8:41

⁶² John 8:44,47

⁶³ 1 John 3:10

⁶⁴ Luke 3:8-9

Do you understand the implications for the Church today?

Israel had an amazing beginning. God rescued them. He held their hand and delivered them out of slavery. He called them his children.⁶⁵ He called them his bride.⁶⁶ Does that sound familiar?

Just because the Church had an amazing beginning doesn't mean that God is your Father if you call yourself a Christian. Don't begin to say to yourselves, "God is our Father." For I tell you that God could raise up children for himself out of rocks. Do the things that prove your repentance. Because the ax is now ready to cut down the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

The Church today does not look like the early Church. Christians today do not live the way they lived. They don't obey the commands of God that the early Church obeyed. The Church today looks like apostate Israel; it looks like the Pharisees.

What are the implications of that for the Church?

What are the implications for your own life?

Christians need to stop thinking of the Church as 'everyone who believes in the information about Jesus and calls themselves Christians.' Christians need to stop thinking that God views the Church today the same way he did the early Church even though the Church today looks nothing like the early Church.

God's children are those who obey him. Anyone who does not obey him is not his child. Anyone who does not obey him is a child of the devil.

We can know who true Christians are by looking at how they live. Do they do the things God wants, or do they reject his radical, extreme, costly commands? As we talked about earlier in this series, it's not just "do they do things for God?" The Pharisees did things for God! Apostate Israel did things for God! Lots of people think they're doing things for God. But are they doing what God said to do? Are they obeying his commands? Are they living the life we see in the book of Acts?

Unless their lives look like what we read in Acts,⁶⁷ they're not doing what God said to do. Unless they're sharing everything in common, they're not doing what God said to do. Unless they're looking out for the needs of others above their own,⁶⁸ they're not doing what God said to do. Unless they're selling their possessions and giving to the brothers and sisters around them,⁶⁹ they're not doing what God said to do. Unless they are living in equality where everyone is equal and no one has more than they need and no one has less,⁷⁰ they are not doing what God said to do.

We have God's commands in Scripture. We can know what God wants. If we know what God wants, we can see if people are living the way God wants. And if we can see if they're obeying him, then we can know who is a real Christian and who is not.

So, then the only question is... what do we do about it?

That's what we're going to look at in the next video.

⁶⁵ Ref. Deuteronomy 14:1, 32:5-6; Jeremiah 3:14, 3:19, 3:22, 31:20

⁶⁶ Ref. Isaiah 54:5; Jeremiah 2:2, 3:6-10, 3:30, 31:31-33; Ezekiel 16:8-14, 16:32-34; Hosea 2:7

⁶⁷ Ref. Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-35

⁶⁸ Ref. Matthew 6:19-34, 20:25-28; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; Philippians 2:1-8

⁶⁹ Ref. Matthew 13:22, 19:16-24; Luke 6:24-25, 6:38, 8:14, 12:15-21, 12:33-34, 19:1-10; Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-35; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; James 4:3-5; 1 John 3:16-18

⁷⁰ Ref. 2 Corinthians 8:1-15