

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 16 – Lies Christians Believe About Their Calling

As we've been discussing, Christians are called to live holy lives – lives that are all about the Kingdom of God without distraction. I want to talk for a bit about what that practically means.

When we look at the average Christian life in America, most Christians go through life doing their own thing, and the Kingdom of God gets kind of tacked on to the side – they do things for the Kingdom, but primarily they focus on their education, their jobs, their income, their families, their retirement, and other such things. We've been discussing how this needs to be reversed. The Kingdom of God needs to be the priority.

However, there is one final issue we need to address – we need to make sure that what we're doing for the Kingdom is what God wants us doing for the Kingdom. That's what we're going to talk about in this video.

When I was growing up in the Church, I often thought I was doing things for the Lord and living for the Kingdom when I actually wasn't. Why? Because I thought that living for the Lord meant that I could just pick whatever I wanted to do, and do it for him.

People in my church often quoted this verse:

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”¹

We took this verse and built our lives around it. The problem was, we didn't understand it. We took this verse to mean, “Go do whatever you're doing, but when you do it, do it for God's glory.”

An example of this mindset is when you're watching a football game and you see one of the football players score a touchdown, get down on one knee, bow his head, and point his finger to heaven. We all see that and think, “Wow, that guy is giving glory to God!”

That football player has built his life around a sport. He built his life around what he wants, what he enjoys, and what he loves to do. But when he does it, he makes sure everyone sees him giving the glory to God. And we think that's what this verse means; we think that's what Paul was talking about.

Essentially, Christians typically think that you can do whatever you want to do (as long as it's not outright sin), but you need to figure out how to do that thing in a way that gives God the glory. That's not what Paul was saying. That's actually the exact opposite of what Paul was saying.

This verse doesn't stand alone. It has a point. If you miss the point of what Paul said, and build your life around what that one individual verse seems to say by itself, then you're doing exactly what Paul warned us about when he said that his instructions have a point – that point being to love – and he warned us that some people will miss the whole point of what he wrote.² They want to be teachers, but they don't understand what they're talking about.

The context of 1 Corinthians 10:31 began three chapters earlier. Paul's whole point in these three chapters was that we *can't* just do whatever we want! We must do what's best for others – not ourselves. When he said, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God,”

¹ 1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)

² Ref. 1 Timothy 1:5-7

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he was not saying, “Do whatever you want, just make sure you do it for God’s glory.” He was actually saying, “You can’t do whatever you want; you have to choose to only do the things that are good for others – things that show others the love of God.”

We can see this clearly if we just look at the verses that come immediately afterwards:

“*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* Never do anything that might hurt others – Jews, Greeks, or God’s church – just as I, also, try to please everybody in every way. I am not trying to do what is good for me but what is good for most people so they can be saved. Imitate me, as I imitate Christ.”³

Paul was not telling them they’re free to do whatever they want to do as long as it’s for God’s glory. He was telling them to only do the things that are good for others – not what’s good for themselves.

Essentially, he was saying, “Your lives must be built around the commands of God.” You can’t just do whatever you want and think it’s for the Lord. You have to do what God said to do.

So many Christians think they’re seeking first the Kingdom of God because they’re building their lives around doing something *for* God. But they’re not doing what God told us to do. They read their Bibles, they go to church, they pray, they have Bible studies, and they do all the typical “Christian” things. They start Christian projects, they make Christian films, they write Christian music, they build Christian buildings, they organize Christian conferences, they plan Christian retreats, they run Christian businesses, they vote for Christian politicians.

Everything about their lives is defined by their “Christianity.” Yet nothing about their lives is defined by what Jesus actually told us to do.

Jesus said the ones who obey him are the ones who love him.⁴ So do we love him if we spend our lives doing something for him, but don’t do what he told us to do?

If Jesus is your king in a war, and he tells you to go fortify the city walls because the enemy is about to attack, but instead you go and paint a mural for him – do you love him? You may have done something *for* him, but you didn’t do what he told you to do. You didn’t do what was best for him. You did what was best for yourself – what you wanted to do. That’s not love.

As Christians, our lives must be defined by doing the things Jesus told us to do. John said, “We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands. Anyone who says, ‘I know God,’ but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”⁵

He said again, “The people who obey God’s commands abide in God, and God abides in them.”⁶ And again, “Loving God means obeying his commands.”⁷

According to John, if you say you know God, but you’re not obeying his commands, you’re a liar. The truth isn’t in you. It doesn’t matter if you think you know God, or if you think you’re doing things for God. If you’re not obeying what he commanded you to do, you don’t know him, you don’t abide in him, he doesn’t abide in you, and you don’t love him.

Christians have made the mistake of thinking that they’re obeying the commands of God when they do just anything Christian. They’ve made the mistake of thinking that they can do whatever they want as long as it’s for the Lord. They’ve made the mistake of thinking that anything done for God is what God wants them to be doing, that as long as they do something for God then they love God.

But that’s not what the Bible says.

For example, look at Paul’s own life. Before Paul became a Christian, he did things *for* God.

³ 1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1 (EXB; italics ESV)

⁴ Ref. John 14:15,21,23

⁵ 1 John 2:3-4

⁶ 1 John 3:24

⁷ 1 John 5:3

He was zealous. He was passionate. He worked hard and gave it his all. He devoted himself to God. He gave his entire life over to doing things for God.

But he wasn't doing what God said to do.

Being zealous for God doesn't mean you're obeying God. Caring a lot about God doesn't mean you're obeying him. Working hard for God and doing things for God doesn't mean you're doing what he wants. It doesn't even matter if you give your entire life to doing things for God. Paul did the same thing before he was a Christian.

The Bible tells us we must be doing the things God explicitly said to do. And the Bible tells us what those things are. John didn't just tell us that we need to be obeying the commands of God, and then leave it up in the air for us to decide what that means for us. No. When John told us that we need to be obeying the commands of God, he was very clear what those commands are. It's not subjective. And it's not different for each person. It's the same for everyone, and it's defined by Scripture.

John said, "Anyone who claims, 'I am in the light,' but hates a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light..."⁸

"This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other."⁹

"This is what God commands: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that we love each other, just as he commanded."¹⁰

"Dear friends, we should love each other, because love comes from God. Everyone who loves has become God's child and knows God."¹¹

"...if we love each other, God abides in us, and his love is made perfect in us."¹²

"Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."¹³

"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. And God gave us this command: Those who love God must also love their brothers and sisters."¹⁴

"...this is not a new command I am writing but is the same command we have had from the beginning. I ask you that we all love each other. And love means living the way God commanded us to live. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is this: Live a life of love."¹⁵

Obeying the commands of God is about living a life of love. John was very clear about that. And throughout this series, we've seen many other places in Scripture where Jesus and the other apostles all taught the exact same thing.¹⁶

But, as we've also seen throughout this series, the Bible defines love. John himself defined love right there in the context of all these other verses. He didn't leave anything up to your own imagination. We can't just bring our own definition. John was clear: loving God, knowing God, living in the light, and being a Christian in the first place means we obey God's commands, and his commands are to love one another, and this is what real love is. John said:

⁸ 1 John 2:9-10

⁹ 1 John 3:11

¹⁰ 1 John 3:23

¹¹ 1 John 4:7

¹² 1 John 4:12

¹³ 1 John 4:16

¹⁴ 1 John 4:20-21

¹⁵ 2 John 5-6

¹⁶ Ref. Matthew 5:38-48, 7:12, 9:10-13, 12:7, 20:25-28, 22:37-40, 25:31-46; Mark 10:42-45, 12:28-34; Luke 6:27-36, 10:25-37, 12:42-44, 14:12-14; John 13:3-5; 13:14-17, 13:34-35, 15:12, 15:17; Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-35, 20:33-35; Romans 12:9-21, 13:8-10, 14:15-18, 15:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13, 9:1-22, 10:23-11:1, 12:1-14:40, 16:14; 2 Corinthians 8:8-9, 13:11; Galatians 5:6, 5:13-15, 6:2, 6:7-10; Ephesians 3:17, 4:1-3, 4:15, 4:28-32, 5:1-2, 5:21; Philippians 1:9, 2:1-8, 4:5; Colossians 1:3-5, 2:1-3, 3:12-17; etc

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“This is how we know what real love is: Jesus laid down his life for us. So we should lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Suppose someone has the world’s possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God’s love is not living in that person. My children, we should love people not only with words and talk, but by showing true love through our actions.”¹⁷

He said again, “This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him. This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is love for us. He sent his Son as the propitiation for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way we also should love each other.”¹⁸

We know what real love is because we can see it: Jesus laid down his life for us. That’s real love. Real love is what God showed toward us. Real love is not the world’s love. Real love is laying down your life for others. Real love is what Jesus did. Real love is what God did by sending his only Son to die to rescue us. Real love gives up everything to help others. And if we don’t live that way, God’s love doesn’t live in us, because if we don’t live that way, we show by our actions that we don’t have real love. Jesus said, “Those who have my commands and obey them are the ones who love me... If people love me, they will obey my teaching.”¹⁹

When Jesus said this, he was talking about love. Real love. He was talking about the radical kind of love that lays down everything in order to help others – in order to meet their needs. The kind of love where you prioritize other people and you completely stop thinking about yourself. You stop looking out for your own needs, you stop looking out for what’s comfortable for you, and you prioritize the needs of other people: What do they need? What is best for them?

Christians need to get out of this “Western Christianity” mindset where they think that they’re obeying God when they do things that have nothing to do with living in real, radical love. Real, radical love is about meeting the needs of others. Jesus defined *needs* as what you’re going to eat, what you’re going to drink, and what you’re going to wear. When he talked about the sheep and the goats, he talked about feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving drink to the thirsty, and welcoming people into your homes.²⁰

Needs are about survival. Needs are about whether you live or die. Needs are about food, water, clothes, and shelter. Needs are about living a simple and humble life.

Needs do not include music, conferences, retreats, church buildings, sound systems, art, movies, businesses, or politics. Needs do not include so many of the things that Christians do – but they think that they’re obeying God when they do those things. Doing those things is not obeying the commands of God, because doing those things is not about laying down your life for the needs of others.

American and Western Christianity has accepted an American and Western lifestyle where they don’t even know the difference between needs and luxuries. Christians think they’re doing things for God when they’re actually neglecting the commands of God for the sake of their own traditions.²¹ They’re doing things the way everyone in the Christian culture around them does things. They’re accepting a version of Christianity where *showing true radical love through laying down our lives for one another in order to meet needs* has been replaced with... pretty much anything other than that.

Christians think they’re obeying God by writing Christian music. They think they’re obeying God by planning Christian conferences. They think they’re obeying God by paying for a nice church building. They think they’re obeying God by buying instruments and equipment for a well-produced

¹⁷ 1 John 3:16-18

¹⁸ 1 John 4:9-11

¹⁹ John 14:21, 23

²⁰ Ref. Matthew 25:31-46

²¹ Ref. Matthew 15:3-9; Mark 7:6-13

worship service. They think they're obeying God by making Christian films. They think they're obeying God by being active in politics. They think they're obeying God by leading youth camps and Christian retreats. They think they're obeying God by doing any one of a number of "Christian" projects where they're willing to spend their time, their money, their energy, and their lives doing anything other than laying down their entire lives in order to meet the needs of others.

Here's an example from my own life:

For many years, I had a dream about what I wanted to do with my life. I have always enjoyed a good story. I loved reading novels with gripping stories. I enjoyed watching movies or TV shows that had well-written plotlines. I loved playing video games with brilliant storylines. A skillfully crafted story fascinated me. It took me into another realm. It kept me on the edge of my seat. It tugged at my emotions. It made me happy. It made me sad. It made me scared. It made me surprised. The power of a good story intrigued me – and I wanted to write my own.

I wanted to tell tales of renowned heroes in far-away lands. I wanted to seize people's emotions and pull them in whatever direction pleased me as I unraveled numerous plotlines simultaneously and eventually joined them together in unexpected ways.

But, being a Christian, I wanted to do it for the Lord.

I often found myself daydreaming about a book I could write or a TV series I could direct. I spent hours thinking up new tales that would be analogies about Christianity. I created an entire series of five novels in my imagination. I always thought about it, jotting down notes, and thinking of new analogies and plot-twists. I knew I wasn't a good writer yet, so I didn't start writing those books. But I wrote short stories. I practiced. I wanted to have the skill to write my novels in a way that would captivate my audience.

And in the meantime, I dreamt up new ways to incorporate the Bible story into my books. I thought of new characters and plotlines that would parallel what I read in the Bible. After all, the Bible was the best story I'd ever read... but I knew a lot of people didn't see it that way, and I wanted to write a series of novels that showed people how incredibly well-written God's story is. I wanted people to see what I saw when I read the Bible: I wanted them to see the story – the story of a God and a rebellious people. A story of slavery and freedom. A story of life, death, and a king who chooses to sacrifice his own life in order to save those rebellious people, and his death unleashes an unstoppable power that conquers his enemy and releases his people from their slavery. My books continued to grow in my mind. I developed the characters, I mapped out the land, I created cultures and nations, I planned mysteries that wouldn't be revealed until the end of all five novels.

These books were my passion. These books were my dream. I couldn't wait to write them. I couldn't wait to tell my story. And I wanted to do it all for the Lord.

But then something happened – a plot twist in my own life story, something I didn't see coming, something I never expected...

I died.

I thought I had been a Christian for over a decade. I thought I had been living for God for many years. I thought I had been planning my life around the Kingdom. I thought I had been obeying God. But everything changed. Everything changed when I read those few simple words:

"Those who have my commands *and obey them* are the ones who love me..."²²

It hit me. I don't love Jesus if I'm not doing what he said I should be doing. So, I began to search – what does he want my life to look like?

It was a relatively quick death. It didn't take long. I hadn't even gotten all the way through the Gospels before my old life died. My goals died. My plans died. My dreams died. My desires died. My books died.

²² John 14:21, emphasis added

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And I came alive.

It was so obvious: Jesus didn't command me to tell stories. He didn't command me to captivate audiences. He didn't tell me to write novels. He didn't tell me to do what I always dreamed of doing. His commands were all about love. Every one of them was about love. They were about meeting needs, prioritizing the lives of others, and making myself nothing so I can help others.

I had spent so many years building my life around something that I thought was totally acceptable simply because all the Christians around me also thought it was acceptable. I had spent my life neglecting the commands of God for the sake of human tradition. Human tradition says we're seeking first the Kingdom when we write novels about God. Human tradition says we're seeking first the Kingdom when we do whatever we want as long as we find ways of doing it for God.

But Jesus said, "Why do you break 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.'"²³

I had spent my life honoring God with my lips. But my heart was far from him. I had spent my life worshiping him. But it was worthless. Why? Because I spent my life breaking his commands and rejecting his word for the sake of Christian tradition. I built my life around doing what the Church said Christians should do rather than around what God said I should do.

If we think we're seeking first the Kingdom, but we're not doing what Jesus said to do, then we're not seeking first the Kingdom. If we think we're serving God, but we're not obeying his commands, then we're not obeying God. And John said that if we're not obeying God, then we're not actually Christians.

God's commands are all about love. They're all about helping one another. They're all about putting others first and not looking out for ourselves. They're about meeting needs – actual needs – so people can live.

But Christians have made up all sorts of other ways they think they can obey God. They build their lives around doing things for the Lord that he never told them to do. And by doing that, they end up breaking the commands from God that we do actually have!

American and Western Christianity has filled itself with so-called "ministry" that God never commanded. It's nothing but human traditions. And therefore, it's not Christianity at all.

We need to start re-evaluating everything. What do we do just because that's what everyone else does? What do we do that's just American? We need to move away from modern, Western Christianity and return to early Church Christianity.

Early Church Christianity didn't have church buildings. They met in homes and fields. Their money didn't go toward a building fund or maintenance or staff. Their money went toward helping one another survive. They didn't have conferences, amazing music, instruments, fancy equipment, coffee shops, retreat centers, youth camps, or any of the other things that Christians today seem to think we need. None of that existed in early Christianity. They didn't have any of those things. They had love. They were defined by love. They were defined by radically looking out for one another rather than themselves. They were defined by having no one in need among them.

Thousands upon thousands were getting saved. Why?

Because, as Jesus put it, "All people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."²⁴

They kept things simple. Their resources went toward meeting needs – actual needs. Food.

²³ Matthew 15:3,6-9

²⁴ John 13:35

Water. Clothing. Shelter. That's what real Christianity is about because that's what Jesus taught.²⁵

Very often, when confronted with some of the things Jesus said we should be doing, Christians will say, "That's not my calling." Christians will think they're called to do something else – they think they're called to business, music, education, science, art, family, or anything else. They think that each person has a different calling, and therefore not everyone is called to do some of the things Jesus talked about.

But when the Bible talks about "callings," it isn't saying some people are called to love others, and some people are called to do business, music, or art. Everyone is called to do what Jesus said to do. After all, John said this is how you can know if someone knows God in the first place.²⁶ It's how you can know if someone is a Christian. Therefore, every Christian must be called to obey the same commands. Right?

God calls different people to different roles within the body – meeting different needs based on the circumstances and the ability of each person. But every person in every role is called to love one another and prioritize the needs of others above their own.

That means when you see a need, if you have the ability to help, you help. And John taught all throughout 1 John that if you don't, God's love doesn't live in you, you don't abide in God, you're still in the darkness, and you don't have eternal life.²⁷ Why? Because your calling is to obey Jesus. And Jesus commanded you to love. And the Bible says *love* is about meeting the needs of others and prioritizing them above yourself.

Your calling is to be a slave of Christ. That's what the word *Christian* means. The suffix *-ian* came from Latin, and it designated who a person belonged to as a slave. So, the word *Christian* means *slave of Christ*. Being a Christian means we're slaves. It's not slavery like we tend to think of it in modern times today – it simply means Jesus is our master, and we must do what he said. That's why the apostles referred to themselves as slaves.²⁸

Christians often think that we have different callings because the Bible says we have different gifts. But they don't understand what *gifts* are in the Bible. They think when the Bible says we each have different gifts that it means we have different *giftings*, or, in other words, some of us are good at some things and others are good at other things.

So, they think, "Well, I'm called to be a worship leader because I'm good at playing the guitar and singing. That guy is called to make Christian films because he is good at making high-quality videos. That person has the gift of hospitality; she really likes having people over, cooking good meals, and entertaining, so she's called to host our small group meetings."

But that's not what the word *gift* means.

The Greek word literally means you have a gift to give – or, a present. You have something to give to others. If you have a gift, it means you have something you can give. A gift is not about what you're good at. It's about what you have to contribute right then, in that moment. Paul wrote about the gift of serving, the gift of encouragement, the gift of giving, and the gift of showing mercy to others.²⁹ Do you think you're not called to serve because you don't have the gift of serving? Or are you not called to encourage because you don't have the gift of encouraging? Or are you not called to give because you don't have the gift of giving? Or are you not called to show mercy to others because you don't have that gift either?

Of course not!

²⁵ Ref. Matthew 5:38-48, 6:19-25, 7:12, 11:5, 12:7, 19:21-24, 20:25-28, 25:31-46; Mark 10:21-25, 10:42-45; Luke 6:24-36, 10:25-37, 11:33-36, 11:41, 12:42-44, 14:12-14, 14:21, 16:19-31, 18:22-25; John 13:3-5, 13:14-17, 13:34-35, 15:12, 15:17

²⁶ Ref. 1 John 2:3-4

²⁷ Ref. 1 John 1:5-7, 2:9-11, 3:6-11, 3:16-18, 3:24, 4:7-12, 4:16, 4:19-21, 5:1-3

²⁸ Ref. Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:1

²⁹ Ref. Romans 12:7-8

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We all know from the rest of the Bible that we're all called to serve, encourage, give, and to show mercy to others. The only question is: What is the current need, and what do I have to bring to the table? If someone needs an extra hand, and I'm there, then I have the gift of serving – it's what I can give them in that moment! If someone needs some encouragement, and I'm with them, I have the gift of encouragement. If someone needs food, clothes, water, money, or something else like that, and I have the means to help, then I have the gift of giving. And if someone needs mercy or compassion, then I have that gift to give to that person.

Here's another example:

What is the gift of hospitality? Does it mean you're good at cooking meals? Does it mean you have great social skills? Does it mean people feel comfortable around you? Does it mean you've decorated your home so it feels warm and welcoming? No. In the Bible, welcoming people into your home wasn't about having them over for dinner. It wasn't about having a hang-out and then sending them home. Hospitality was about putting a roof over their heads. It was about giving them a place to live. It was about meeting needs.

For example, Peter traveled and stayed with Simon the Tanner for “many days.”³⁰ Simon the Tanner welcomed Peter into his home *for an extended stay*. Then, we see that Peter was so confident in Simon the Tanner's hospitality that, in the next chapter, Peter invited complete strangers to also come stay the night in Simon the Tanner's house.³¹

They had small houses back then! Peter was living in this other guy's house. Peter then also invited other people to come stay with this guy. Why? Because Simon the Tanner was a real Christian. He had the means to help, so he helped. Peter knew he could invite others to come and stay, because Peter saw Simon's love. Peter knew he was real and would never refuse to help someone in need of shelter for the night.

Simon had a gift. He had something he could give. His gift wasn't that he was good at hosting. His gift was his house. If you have a house, then you have the gift of hospitality. It's not about what you're good at. It's about what you have that you can use to help others. It's about putting others above yourself. It's about using your resources for the good of others.

All our gifts and callings are about doing what Jesus taught. He taught love. He taught that we should share everything we have with one another. Your gift is merely about what you have that you can share.

As followers of Jesus, we are called to do what he taught. Period.

There are many ways this applies. My wife, Tess, used to really want to make feature-length films for the Kingdom. She had many ideas of how she could write, direct, and produce films that tell stories about God and about people who have lived their lives for God in the past. She had a business idea about how she could market Christian art, music, and film to help other Christian artists get their voices heard. She thought doing this was a way she could work for the Kingdom. She thought this was obeying the commands of Jesus.

But that all changed for her.

Because Jesus didn't call us to make movies. He didn't call us to do art, music, or film. He didn't call us to be creative and express ourselves through media. The early Church didn't make art for Jesus. They didn't get distracted with doing entertainment for the Lord. No, they transformed the face of the entire world, and they did it while only devoting themselves to what the apostles were teaching – love.

Jesus called us to love.

How much time and money are we going to pour into doing projects for the Lord that he

³⁰ Ref. Acts 9:43

³¹ Ref. Acts 10:23

never told us to do? All that time and money could be poured into helping other people survive – getting them food, getting them water, getting them clothes, and getting a roof over their heads. Our resources could go toward helping people live. But instead they’re going toward art, media, and other projects. We’re prioritizing American Christian traditions over the survival of others – and over the priorities we see in the Bible. When we choose to live our lives doing what we want to do for the Lord, rather than what he told us to do, we could easily find ourselves doing the exact opposite of what God wants.

God told us what he wants us to be doing with our resources. If we’re using our resources to do something for the Lord other than what he told us to do with those resources, we’re doing exactly what the Pharisees did. Earlier in this video, I quoted Jesus when he told the Pharisees that they were choosing human tradition over God’s commands. Do you know the context – both historical and biblical – of what he was saying there?

God told the Israelites in the Law to honor their father and mother.³² This is a verse that’s majorly misunderstood in the Church today. We’ve come up with all of our own ideas about what it means rather than looking for how it was understood by the original audience. In all the ancient Jewish writings available to us, including the words of Jesus himself, it’s clear what they thought it meant to *honor*. They didn’t think it meant just *be respectful*. They didn’t think it meant just “Say ‘yes sir’ or ‘yes ma’am.’” They also didn’t think it meant doing whatever your parents want you to do. No, they understood that God was telling them to take care of the needs of their parents in their old age. Make sure your parents have what they need.

But the Pharisees didn’t do that. They told people that if you have something that could be used to help your parents, you could instead choose to give it to God in some other way. When Jesus told the Pharisees that they were breaking God’s commands for the sake of their own traditions – this is what he was talking about! Here is the full context:

“Why do you break God’s command for the sake of your traditions? God said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who says cruel things to his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say a person can tell his father or mother, ‘I have something I could use to help you, but I have given it to God already.’ You teach that person not to honor his father or his mother. 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.’”³³

God had told the Israelites to honor their father and mother. In other words, God had told them to love their parents – to make sure their needs were met. But the Pharisees taught the people that they could choose to do something else for God instead. If they had something that could be used to help their parents, they could instead do something else with that thing as long as it was for God.

This is the same thing the Church does today.

Jesus gave us commands. He told us what he wants us to do. Christians today have the means to obey. They have the means to show the love of Jesus to others. They could sell their possessions and give to the poor. They could give food to the hungry. They could give water to the thirsty. They could give clothes to the naked. They could open their homes to strangers. They could share everything they own. They could give to everyone who asks.

But instead, they purchase instruments so they can play music to God. They buy cameras so they can make Christian films. They rent out giant buildings and hold massive conferences. They spend their money on equipment, sound systems, lights, projectors, and backdrops so they can put on

³² Ref. Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16

³³ Matthew 15:3-9

a concert that they call “worship.” They donate money to their church – paying for a building, maintenance, and a staff – rather than giving their money to the poor.

When Christians take resources that could be used to give food, clothing, water, or shelter to people, and they instead put it toward music, equipment, buildings, conferences, lights, retreats, or any other modern “Christian” thing, they are prioritizing those things over people’s lives. They are saying that these “Christian” things that the Early Church didn’t even do are more important than whether or not some of their brothers and sisters have their basic needs met for survival.

That’s why John called it “hating” a brother or sister.³⁴ It doesn’t mean you *think* you hate them. It simply means you don’t go out of your way, above and beyond, to make sure they have what they need to live. Hatred is when, instead, you wanted to have that nice guitar so your music sounds better, or that expensive microphone, or that personal retreat. You prioritized something trivial over their very survival.

Of course that’s hatred.

Furthermore, when Christians do this, they’re saying God also values those trivial things over the lives of his children. They think what they’re doing pleases God! They think God cares about the quality of their music, the building they meet in, or their Christian camp more than he cares about whether or not there are people in his body who are struggling to survive.

God cares about us meeting needs because that’s the only thing that is actually important. The most important thing the Early Church did was make sure that there was no one in need among them.³⁵ It was radical, and it meant everyone chose to live simpler lives for the sake of others. But they did it because it was the most important thing.

God desires mercy, not sacrifice.³⁶ Or, in modern terms, God desires complete selfless love, not a worship service.

Christians today have neglected God’s commands for the sake of their own traditions. Their traditions tell them they need all these fancy Christian things that the Early Church did just fine without. Their traditions tell them to spend their time, money, and energy doing things for God that he never commanded them to do.

As Jesus said, Christians have something they could use to help those in need, but they’ve given it to God already. Jesus called this “rejecting the word of God.” He said this is what it means to honor God with your lips, but have your heart be far from him. He said this kind of worship is worthless.

Think about that.

What are you doing for the Kingdom? Are your projects, goals, donations, time, money, and energy going into the things that Jesus directly commanded us to do? Or have you found another way you want to serve God?

So many Christians waste their lives away doing something for the Lord – but Jesus would call it worthless.

A lot of times, Christians think they need amazing worship services, flashing lights, well-produced music, films, youth camps, retreats, and many other things like these because (though they would never put it in these words) they feel the need to dress God up and make him look cool. They waste their time and money trying to put together a good presentation, trying to make things look cool, or trying to be artistic. Instead of putting their money where God says to put it, they put their money into making things look better and attracting people through art, design, flashing lights, well produced music, and overall presentation.

³⁴ Ref. 1 John 2:9, 2:11, 3:15, 4:20

³⁵ Ref. Acts 2:44-46, 4:32-35

³⁶ Ref. Proverbs 21:3; Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:10-13, 12:7

They're so used to a dry, boring, religious Christianity that they think we're supposed to put in some effort to make God look cool and make Christianity look appealing. This is the opposite of what Paul did.

“Dear brothers and sisters, when I came to you, I did not come preaching God’s mystery with eloquent words or a show of human wisdom. I decided that while I was with you I would forget about everything except Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. So when I came to you, I was weak and fearful and trembling. My teaching and preaching were not with words of human wisdom that persuade people but with demonstrations of the Spirit and of power. This was so that your faith would be in God’s power and not in human wisdom.”³⁷

When Paul preached, he didn’t make it flashy. He didn’t dress it up. He didn’t try to attract people by being cool. No, he trusted in God’s power and came to them in weakness. He was trembling. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he said, “Some people say, ‘Paul’s letters are powerful and sound important, but when he is with us, he is weak. And his speaking skills are deplorable.’”³⁸

Christians today have forgotten the example of Paul. They don’t imitate him as he imitated Jesus. They try to dress up Jesus. They try to make Christianity look cool. They value being artistic. They think it’s something that pleases God. And they end up spending so much time and money on it.

But it’s not what God wants.

When the Lord first woke me up and got me to start taking him seriously, it was partially through the most unproduced, unprofessional, unartistic presentation I have (to this day) ever seen. There was nothing glamorous about it. There wasn’t much well-done about it at all.

But it had truth. That’s all it needed.

God told us where he wants our money going. He told us where he wants our time going. So, we need to prioritize what he prioritizes when we try to obey him. If we prioritize being artistic or well produced or attractive, we’re not prioritizing what he said to do. And we’re not believing in the power of the truth.

Jesus also didn’t dress up his teaching to attract people. In fact, he said, “Those who are not offended because of me are blessed.”³⁹

Either the truth will set people free... or it will offend them. So, stop trying to dress it up. Stop wasting so much time trying to do things in a human way. God’s wisdom isn’t man’s wisdom.⁴⁰ You don’t have to dress it up. You don’t have to have a good presentation. You don’t have to look cool.

You just have to obey what you were told to do. That’s it.

Tess and I try to keep our presentation simple. Early on, we had ideas of making well-produced videos and feature-length films. We dreamt of ways to make things cool and get people’s attention. But the Lord showed us a better way. We want to see more Christians recognize that there’s no need to dress up the truth. There’s no need to make it flashy. There’s no need to make it attractive. Because the truth – the real truth – isn’t like the boring, religious Christianity that requires flashing lights and well-produced videos. The real truth either sets people free... or it offends them and they leave.

Real Christianity doesn’t need a budget. It doesn’t need equipment. It doesn’t need to be polished. Real Christianity has the power of God. Real Christianity – with the real truth about what the Bible teaches about what it means to be a Christian – that truth has power, and it will set people free.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

³⁸ 2 Corinthians 10:10

³⁹ Matthew 11:6

⁴⁰ Ref. 1 Corinthians 1:18-28, 3:18-23

Finally, when we talk about obeying God, we need to talk about the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit, and we can be led by the Spirit. But a lot of Christians don't know what that means. Many Christians think they're being led by the Spirit, but they're spending their lives doing things the Spirit would never say to do.

Can we receive direction and leadership from the Spirit? Absolutely! Will the Spirit of God tell us to spend our lives doing something that is not centered around the things God said to do? No. Jesus said the Holy Spirit will remind us of everything he taught us.⁴¹ He said the Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, and the Spirit will lead us into all truth.⁴² And he said "the teaching" is the truth.⁴³ And John told us plainly what "the teaching" is:

"This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other."⁴⁴

The Spirit will teach us what love is. The Spirit will remind us of what Jesus taught. The Spirit will lead us into living a life defined by love. It all comes down to love.

The Spirit will not lead us into a life defined by doing things for God that God never told us to do. The Spirit will not lead us into a life defined by human traditions rather than by the commands of God. The Spirit will lead us into living out the commands of God.

But a lot of Christians need to realize that the Spirit is not a substitute for the commands of God. John told us, "We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands. Anyone who says, 'I know God,' but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person."⁴⁵

But as we've already seen, John didn't leave it there. He then went on to tell us what those commands are. This means that the commands we're supposed to be obeying are the commands found in Scripture! John was talking about the commands in Scripture. Every true Christian will live a life defined by obeying the commands found in Scripture. No true Christian will do anything different. And the Holy Spirit will never tell us to do anything different.

Many Christians need to realize that if they're waiting for a prophetic word to tell them to do something that the Bible already tells them to do, they're rejecting the word of God. They're disobeying. Jesus already told us what to do. Why do you need the Spirit to tell you again?

If a stranger knocks on your door, and you need a prophetic word to tell you whether or not to let them in, you don't understand the Bible. If someone in need asks for help, and you're waiting for a word from God to tell you if you should help, you don't know God. If you're waiting for a word from God to tell you something that the word of God already told you to do, you're rejecting the word of God for the sake of your own traditions.

Your human traditions tell you that the Spirit is the only means of knowing God's will. Your human traditions tell you that the Spirit is the only way to know what God wants you to do. Yet God's word is full of his commands about what he wants us to be doing, and instructions concerning what he cares about. And Paul told us that the point of Scripture is to teach us righteousness – to teach us how to live, and how to make our decisions based on what God says is right.⁴⁶

The Spirit will lead you into truth, yes. The Spirit will direct you when necessary to get you where you need to be to help people, yes. The Spirit will sometimes tell you where to go, yes. The Spirit will sometimes tell you who to talk to and what to say, yes. But the Spirit will not substitute the Bible. The Spirit is not a substitute for the commands of Jesus we have in Scripture. And the Spirit will never contradict the commands of Jesus we have in Scripture.

⁴¹ Ref. John 14:26

⁴² Ref. John 14:16-17, 15:26, 16:13-14

⁴³ Ref. John 17:17

⁴⁴ 1 John 3:11

⁴⁵ 1 John 2:3-4

⁴⁶ Ref. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

If Scripture already tells you what you should do in any particular situation, you don't need a word from God. Perhaps the Spirit will remind you of something the Bible says, yes. But perhaps the Spirit will stay quiet, because he wants you to learn, not just listen. We're supposed to learn what God wants and know his commands. The Bible tells us what we need to know. But we need to learn what it says. We need to know what it tells us our lives should look like. We need to read it cover to cover and see the full picture. We need to see the message and not just individual verses. We're supposed to grow in understanding.

The Spirit doesn't want to spoon-feed us every time. We're supposed to mature.

Remember what we saw at the beginning of this series: In Ancient Israel, during their rebellion against God, they didn't realize they were in rebellion against God. They thought they were serving God, worshiping God, and living for God. One aspect of their rebellion was that they had many, many false prophets among them.

These false prophets prophesied in the name of the Lord. It's clear from some of the stories that the false prophets themselves didn't realize that they were false prophets. They thought they were hearing God. They thought they were following God's leading. They thought they were speaking for God.

They thought they were real prophets!

The New Testament warns us that we will have false prophets in the Church, too.⁴⁷ We should expect it to be the same way – they won't realize they're false prophets. They'll think they're hearing God. They'll think they're following God's leading. They'll think they're speaking for God.

Jesus said that many will call him, "Lord, Lord" but he will tell them that he never knew them, and he will not allow them into Heaven.⁴⁸ One of the things he specifically said about those people is that they prophesied in his name. They thought they heard God's voice. They thought they followed God and obeyed him because they thought they were being led by the Spirit.

But Jesus said he never knew them. And he said why: They didn't obey his commands.

Jesus was saying there will be many people who think they're hearing the Spirit. They'll think they're doing what God wants. They'll think they're walking in the Spirit, and living in an intimate relationship with God, but in reality, they never actually knew him.

That leaves an important question:

How do you know you're not one of them?

If you decide what your life should look like, or what you should be doing primarily through the Spirit and not through Scripture, how do you know you're really hearing God? How do you know it's not some other spirit? How do you know it's not just your own ideas?

A lot of Christians are quick to say, "His sheep know his voice!"⁴⁹ And that's true. But Jesus also said that a lot of people are going to think they're sheep when they're actually goats.⁵⁰ Just because you might think you know his voice doesn't mean you actually do.

Jesus said the sheep are separated from the goats based on whether or not they fed his brothers and sisters, gave them water, gave them clothes, welcomed them into their homes, helped them in their trials, and other things like these. In other words – whether or not they obeyed his commands – the commands we have in Scripture.

This is the same thing Jesus said about those who prophesy in his name.⁵¹ He said they prophesied in his name, but they didn't obey his commands.

⁴⁷ Ref. Matthew 7:15-20, 24:11, 24:24; Mark 13:22-23; 2 Peter 2:1

⁴⁸ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

⁴⁹ Ref. John 10:4

⁵⁰ Ref. Matthew 25:31-46

⁵¹ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

Ep. 16 – Lies Christians Believe About Their Calling

When the Bible tells us we need to obey the commands of Jesus, it also tells us what those commands are. His sheep will know his voice because his sheep will know his commands. His sheep will obey his commands. And therefore, according to John, his sheep will abide in him, and he will abide in them.⁵²

The promise that we will receive the Spirit is not for everyone who believes in Jesus; it's for everyone who obeys him – because only those who obey him are actually Christians; we'll get into that more in depth in a later video. However, the point for now is that if people aren't obeying the commands from Jesus that we have in Scripture, then they won't have the Spirit, they won't hear his voice, and they will often think they know his voice when they've really never heard it at all.

To hear and learn his voice, you have to know and obey his word. That's the clear message in Scripture.

Look at the Old Testament as an example. The true prophets in the Old Testament preached a message that lined up with what Moses had already told the people in the Law. Both the Law and the Prophets are summed up in the same word: *love*.⁵³ Moses taught the people to love one another, and he told them that if they didn't, God would punish them and drive them into exile.⁵⁴ Then the prophets came. They told the people that they weren't loving one another, and that if they didn't repent, God would punish them and drive them into exile. The prophets were telling the people to do something that the Law had already told them to do. And, the prophets were warning the people about a punishment that the Law had already warned them about.

True prophecy will line up with Scripture. And Scripture tells us that we're supposed to be following the commands we have from Jesus in the Bible. Moreover, Scripture is very clear about what those particular commands are. No true prophecy is going to tell us we're called to do anything else. We will not receive a word from God that contradicts the word of God.

When Christians talk to unbelievers about God, they're often heard saying, "Truth isn't relative! There is such a thing as absolute truth!" When Christians say this, they're saying that if something is true, then it's true. It can't be true for you and not true for me. God is either real or he's not. Jesus is either who he said he is, or he's not. God can't be true for me, but not be true for you. He either exists or he doesn't. Truth is not relative.

Christians understand this concept. But when it comes to the commands of God, suddenly they think truth *is* relative! They think everyone has a different calling, everyone has a different way of obeying God, and the commands you have to obey are the commands for you, but the commands I have to obey are the commands for me.

This is not what the Bible teaches. Truth is not relative.

When the Bible says that we must obey the commands of God, it also tells us what those commands are. They are the same commands for you as they are for me. The Spirit is not going to lead you into some other commands. He will lead everyone into truth. Jesus said God's teaching is truth, and John said that "the teaching" is that we must love one another, and John told us what real love looks like practically.

Everything we need is in Scripture. The Spirit is given to us to help us. Not to replace the Bible.

On a similar note, many Christians think they know they're obeying God because they're being blessed by God. For example, someone might say, "I know I'm serving God because I've seen God support me and provide in miraculous ways. I've seen doors open that shouldn't have opened. I've seen crazy things happen that prove God is for me, and that he backs what I'm doing!" People think

⁵² Ref. 1 John 2:24, 3:24, 4:12, 4:16

⁵³ Ref. Matthew 7:12, 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:26-28

⁵⁴ Ref. Leviticus 26:14-46; Deuteronomy 27:9-26, 28:15-68, 31:15-30

miracles prove they're doing something that pleases God. They think it means they have God's support. They think it proves that what they're doing is what God wants.

But that's not true.

Saying, "I know I'm serving God because I've seen God support me and work miracles" is the same as saying, "I know I'm a true Christian because I prophesy in Jesus' name, cast out demons in his name, and work mighty wonders in his name."⁵⁵ Jesus said people will do all those things, yet he will tell them that he never knew them. He also said false prophets and false Christs would come and perform miracles.⁵⁶ Paul said the Man of Lawlessness will perform signs and wonders.⁵⁷ And John said the false prophet will call down fire from heaven.⁵⁸

Miracles don't mean God is on your side.

The Bible tells us how we can know if God is on our side. It gives us the correct measuring stick to use. But that measuring stick is not whether or not we see miracles. John said, "We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands. Anyone who says, 'I know God,' but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person."⁵⁹

We can be sure that we know God if we obey his commands. That's it! That's the measuring stick we're given!

Are you doing something that seems like it's being blessed? It's going well? Does it seem like God is on your side – like things are going well and miraculously lining up in your favor? Great! But... that doesn't actually mean anything. The Bible tells us that even the wicked prosper.⁶⁰ When the devil tempted Jesus, he showed that he has the authority to give all of the kingdoms and splendor of the world to whoever he chooses.⁶¹ The devil can bless people, too! Things lining up for you and working in your favor does not indicate, in the slightest bit, whether or not God is for you or against you.

Your measuring stick is whether or not you are obeying the commands of God. That's it.

If you're building your life around doing things for the Lord, and it seems like every door miraculously opens, and everything is working out in your favor, but the things you're doing are not the commands of God we have in Scripture, then it's very possible that, if nothing changes, you will be shocked on the last day, and it will be a day of darkness for you, not light.

"Woe to you who want the day of the LORD to come. Why do you want that day to come? It will bring darkness for you, not light."⁶²

At the end of the day, being a Christian means we're called to love. We're called to love with the radical love of Jesus. Everything we're doing for the Kingdom should be centered on that kind of love.

We're not called to business. We're not called to science. We're not called to the arts. We're not called to story-telling. We're not called to be worship leaders. We're not called to parenting. We're not called to studying. We're not called to have conferences or Christian retreats. We're not called to have youth camps. We're not called to make films. We're not called to put on the perfect presentation.

We're called to love.

Love must be the center. Love must be the priority. Love – true biblical love – is what makes us different. It's what makes us holy. It's our true worship.⁶³ It's what should define our lives.

⁵⁵ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

⁵⁶ Ref. Matthew 24:24; Mark 13:22

⁵⁷ Ref. 2 Thessalonians 2

⁵⁸ Ref. Revelation 13

⁵⁹ 1 John 2:3-4

⁶⁰ Ref. Psalm 73:3-12

⁶¹ Ref. Matthew 4:8-9; Luke 4:5-7

⁶² Amos 5:18

⁶³ Ref. Proverbs 21:3; Micah 6:6-8; Hosea 6:6; Romans 12:1-2

Ep. 16 – Lies Christians Believe About Their Calling

Seeking first the Kingdom of God means loving one another with the radical love of God. Loving the Lord our God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds, and all our strength means obeying his commands in everything we do with our lives – and his commands are to love one another with his radical love.