

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 24 – Why Did Paul Say to Avoid People?

What I'm going to talk about in this video is likely going to challenge your current beliefs. It's something that I don't hear talked about in the Church at all; most Christians think the opposite of what I'm about to say. So, I'd like to ask you to pause for a moment. Ask the Lord to help you accept anything that is true – anything he might be trying to teach you. As always, please go to Scripture! See if it says the same thing I'm saying in this video. I don't want you to just follow me! In this video, I'm going to address something I see in Scripture, but I've heard very few Christians talk about or apply to their own lives.

And that needs to change.

What we will cover in this video is key for the Church to be able to grow. But it's something that most Christians right now don't accept.

Father, I ask that you would use this video to teach people. Use this video to show people ways that they bring human traditions to their lives instead of following what the Bible says. I ask that you would open eyes to see what Scripture teaches, and what it says we should be doing about these things. Use this video, and this series, to change lives and bring people into the life that you intended us to live.

Things often get sticky when we talk about what our response should be when we see apostasy in the Church.

I've known a number of people who have spent years – decades even – attending the same church, trying to reach the same people, trying to show people that they weren't following God, but no one listened.

I read a book once where a pastor taught Christians that the Church needs to change. He recognized ways that the Church today doesn't look like the early Church. He challenged Christians to change their lives, to re-prioritize. There were several things in that book that were great! But there was also something in that book that caught my eye. Toward the beginning of the book, he said that he hoped his book would encourage Christians who have seen the problems in the Church today. He knew many Christians have seen the problems in the Church, they want something different, and they've left their churches, looking for something more like what they read about in the book of Acts. This pastor wrote that he hoped his book would encourage them to return to the churches they left. He referenced Hebrews, which says, "You should not neglect meeting together..."¹

This is the view most Christians hold. "Sure, there are a lot of problems – the Church today has a lot of issues. But we shouldn't neglect to meet together. That's a biblical command."

However, this mindset comes back to the same issue we discussed in the last video. If you are regularly meeting together, every single week, with a bunch of people who don't obey the commands of God... are you doing what Hebrews said to do?

Are you meeting with fellow believers?

¹ Ref. Hebrews 10:25

Or did you fail to judge the tree by the fruit?² Did you fail to recognize the difference between true Christianity and false Christianity?

John called false believers “the antichrist.”³ Does God want us to not neglect to meet together with the antichrist?! Does God want us regularly meeting together with people who are apostate? If a Christian left a church because no one in the church wanted to obey the radical commands of God, and that Christian wanted to find something more... should we be encouraging that Christian to return to those people because one single verse in the Bible says we shouldn’t neglect to meet together?

Doesn’t “meeting together” imply that the other people are real Christians too?

This pastor made the same mistake many Christians make. He saw that real Christianity means we must live our lives obeying the commands of God. But he didn’t let go of the Protestant theology that told him everyone who says they believe in Jesus is a Christian. He didn’t judge the tree by its fruit. The only way that verse in Hebrews could apply to the situation he was talking about is if all those people who don’t obey God are also Christians, too.

But the Bible clearly says they’re not.⁴

Meeting together with false believers is not what Hebrews was telling us to do. But most Christians don’t realize this because they don’t know how to recognize false believers in the first place! Not only is this completely misapplying “not neglecting to meet together,” but it’s also a direct contradiction of what the Bible tells us our response should actually be.

By telling Christians to keep meeting together with false believers, as if some religious meeting is what God really cares about, this pastor actually encouraged Christians to disregard everything the Bible says about how we should handle apostasy in the Church. He did the same thing Christians today do with almost everything else – he took one Bible verse out of context and applied it across the board with no regard to anything else the Bible says on the topic.

It’s a common mistake. But it’s not how we should handle Scripture.

The Bible warned us about apostasy. It told us the Church would fall away.⁵ It also told us what to do when we see it. We need to know what it said to do, and we need to do it.

The Bible must be our standard for how we’re going to respond – not our own thoughts, our own feelings, or some pastor’s advice. So, what does the Bible say about meeting together with people who think they’re Christians, but who refuse to obey the commands of God? What does the Bible say our response should be when we see that the Church has become apostate?

As I mentioned in the last video, in 1 Corinthians, Paul addressed some issues in the Church. He told them to remove the leaven or it would spread. If they allowed the leaven (which he called “the leaven of sin and wickedness”) to stay among them, it would spread among them and it would change the whole batch of dough – the whole Body of Christ.

This is what Paul said to the Corinthians:

“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... I wrote

² Ref. Matthew 7:15-20

³ Ref. 1 John 2:18-29

⁴ Ref. Matthew 7:15-27, 10:34-39, 12:33-37, 12:48-50, 13:18-23, 16:24-25, 19:21-24, 25:31-36; Mark 3:33-35, 8:34-37, 10:21-25; Luke 6:20-36, 6:43-49, 8:11-15, 8:21, 9:23-26, 9:61-62, 11:27-28, 12:15-21, 12:22-34, 12:42-44, 13:24, 14:25-35, 16:11-15, 17:33, 18:22-25; John 5:28-29, 12:24-26, 12:47-50, 14:15, 14:21, 14:23; Acts 10:35, 26:19-20; Romans 6:1-14, 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 7:19; 2 Corinthians 5:9-11, 5:14-15, 8:8-9, 9:6-13, 11:4; Galatians 1:10, 6:7-10; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 2:17; Colossians 2:11-12; 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 6:17-19; 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 4:3-5; Titus 2:11-14, 3:14; Hebrews 4:11-13, 11:1-12:1; James 1:22-25, 1:26-27, 2:13, 2:14-26, 4:3-5; 1 Peter 1:22-23, 2:24, 3:10-12; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 1 John 1:5-7, 2:3-6, 2:9-11, 2:15, 2:24-25, 3:4-11, 3:14, 3:16-24, 4:8, 4:12, 4:16-21, 5:1-3, 5:18-20; 2 John 9; 3 John 11; Jude 3-19; Revelation 3:1-3, 3:15-22, 19:6-8, 20:11-14

⁵ 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

to you in my earlier letter not to associate with those who sin sexually. But I did not at all mean you should not associate with those of this world who sin sexually, or with the greedy, or swindlers, or those who worship idols. To get away from them you would have to leave this world. I am writing to tell you that you must not associate with those who call themselves believers in Christ but who sin sexually, or are greedy, or worship idols, or slander, or get drunk, or cheat people. Do not even eat with people like that. 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. The Scripture says, ‘You must remove the evil person among you.’”⁶

In this section, we see that Paul had been telling the early Church not to associate with people who live in sin. But here, he clarified: When he told people this, he didn’t mean they should disassociate with people in the world. He was not talking about unbelievers who knew they were unbelievers. He meant that they should disassociate with people who called themselves Christians, yet who continued living in sin.

In other words, he was saying, “do not continue to associate with false believers.” He was saying you can know who they are based on how they live, and if they’re living that way without repenting, you need to stop associating with them.

The word he used, translated *associate*, is a Greek word that means *mix up together*. He was saying, “You can’t be mixed up together in the same batch of dough.” Why? Because if you have *any* leaven *at all* in your dough, and you don’t remove it, the entire batch of dough will rise. The entire batch of dough will become leavened.

He was telling the Corinthians that they couldn’t just continue associating with and surrounding themselves with people who called themselves believers but refused to submit to and follow the commands of Jesus. He went so far as to say, “Do not even eat with people like that.”

Don’t associate with them. Don’t even eat with them. These are the instructions Scripture gives when we see people who call themselves Christians, but they don’t obey God’s commands.

That’s a far cry from telling true Christians to return to their churches and continue meeting together with those people!

When Paul told the Corinthians that they must judge the Church, he said way more than just, “Recognize the fruit.” He told them to recognize the fruit, and then stop associating with those who call themselves Christians but continue to bear bad fruit. He wasn’t just telling them to know the difference. He was calling them to action.

Paul quoted the Law of Moses, which said, “You must remove the evil person among you.” In the Law of Moses, this was a phrase used whenever God told the Israelites to put someone to death.⁷ Paul wasn’t telling us to put someone to death. But he was saying God is still that serious about not allowing evil in our midst.

The Kingdom of God is no longer a physical earthly kingdom – it’s a spiritual kingdom.⁸ So, now it’s not about putting someone to death. But beyond that, nothing has changed – we are still supposed to remove the evil person from among us. We’re not supposed to keep associating. We’re not supposed to even eat with someone like that.

This is something Paul taught on numerous occasions...

“But even if we ourselves or an angel from heaven were to preach to you a different message than the Good News we preached, let him be anathema! I said this before, and now I say it again: If anyone is preaching a different message than the one you received, let him be anathema!”⁹

⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:6-7, 9-13

⁷ Ref. Deuteronomy 17:7, 19:19, 21:21, 22:21, 22:24, 24:7

⁸ Ref. Matthew 4:17, 10:7; Mark 9:1; Luke 17:20-21; John 18:33-37

⁹ Galatians 1:8-9

Here, Paul used the word *anathema*. Most Christians read this thinking Paul was saying, “Let him be cursed!” They picture it as if Paul was calling down some curse on the person who was teaching a different gospel. But that’s actually not quite right.

The word *anathema* is an Old Testament word. We often don’t realize it, because it’s a Greek word and the Old Testament was written in Hebrew. But during the time Paul was writing, his audience would have been using the Greek translation of the Old Testament (it’s called the *Septuagint*). They would have known what Paul was saying, because the word *anathema* was used countless times throughout the Septuagint. And it never meant calling a curse down on someone.

For example, Moses told the Israelites that if anyone ever came along, telling them to worship false gods, and if an entire city followed them and worshiped false gods, then the Israelites were to wipe out that entire city, burn all of the spoils with fire, and leave the city uninhabited forever. He described it as, “With an anathema, you shall anathematize it, and everything in it.”¹⁰

Similarly, Moses told the Israelites that when they entered the promised land, they were supposed to completely destroy all the Canaanites who lived there. The Canaanites were extremely evil, and God was not allowing Israel to make any peace with them. He told them not to allow the Canaanites to continue living in their midst. They were supposed to completely wipe them out. In the Septuagint, it said, “With anathema, you shall anathematize them... lest they teach you to do all their abominations that they did for their gods and you sin before the Lord your God.”¹¹

In the Old Testament, *anathema* wasn’t a curse you called down on someone. It was something you did. It was an action. *Anathema* was about removing the evil person from among you so that that person wouldn’t spread their wickedness to you. Or in other words, it was about removing the leaven from the batch of dough so that the whole batch of dough didn’t rise. In short, when Paul told the Galatians that if someone came, preaching a different gospel, that person should be *anathema*, Paul wasn’t calling down a curse; he was telling the Galatians that they had to do something. *Anathema* was an action. The Galatians had a responsibility to act.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he quoted a Bible verse about putting someone to death. Similarly, here, when he wrote to the Galatians, he referenced a biblical concept about wiping people out. He was not saying to kill anyone! But he was saying, “You can’t let this continue. You have a responsibility to get this out of your midst.”

Paul was telling them to take action.

Paul was telling both the Corinthians and the Galatians that they could not associate with people who call themselves believers, yet who either refuse to follow Jesus or who teach a different gospel. When Christians today see people calling themselves believers, yet living a life in complete contradiction to everything Jesus and the apostles taught, we are instructed by Scripture to not associate with them.

When Christians today see people believing and teaching a gospel that doesn’t line up with Scripture – a gospel that says you’re saved by believing in Jesus – regardless of whether or not you obey him – Christians are commanded by Scripture to have nothing to do with them, to anathematize them, to not associate with them, and to not even eat with them.

That means we can’t keep going to church with them. It means we don’t keep doing Bible studies with them. We don’t keep praying with them. We don’t keep treating them as if they’re true brothers and sisters.

Because they’re not.

You can judge a tree by its fruit.

“Anyone who says, ‘I know God,’ but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is

¹⁰ Ref. Deuteronomy 13:15 (NETS)

¹¹ Deuteronomy 20:17-18 (NETS)

not in that person.”¹²

“Anyone who claims, ‘I am in the light,’ but hates a brother or sister, is still in the darkness... Whoever hates a brother or sister is in darkness, lives in darkness, and does not know where to go, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”¹³

“Anyone who continues to sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning. The Son of God came for this purpose: to destroy the devil’s work... In this way it is apparent who God’s children are and who the devil’s children are: Those who do not do what is right are not God’s children, and those who do not love their brothers and sisters are not God’s children.”¹⁴

If they are not God’s children, then you shouldn’t treat them like God’s children. John called them “the antichrist” and “the devil’s children.”¹⁵ If you want to live for the Lord, and you want to please the Lord, then you must separate yourself from the apostasy. It doesn’t mean you can’t try to reach them and get them to repent! But it means you treat them the same way you would an unbeliever. You keep yourself separate. This was a concept Paul taught very consistently:

“Brothers and sisters, I urge you to look out for those who cause divisions and who create stumbling blocks. They are against the true teaching you learned, so stay away from them. Such people are not serving our Lord Christ but are only doing what pleases themselves. They use smooth talk and fine words to deceive the hearts of the innocent.”¹⁶

Here, Paul said to stay away from those people who lead people away from the true teaching. John said “the teaching” is “we must love each other.”¹⁷ And the New Testament explained what *love* means.¹⁸ Paul was again saying to stay away from those who teach anything different. The gospel preached in the Church today is a different teaching. It teaches that you’re saved by believing information, but the Bible teaches that you’re saved by becoming loyal to Jesus and obeying him. The gospel being preached in the Church today is, as Paul put it, “A different gospel, with a different Jesus, and a different spirit.”¹⁹

Paul’s instructions were to stay away from this.

Paul was also saying to stay away from those who call themselves Christians, but who only do what pleases themselves. In other words, stay away from those who call themselves Christians, but whose actions prove that they’re only looking out for themselves. They don’t live in the radical love of Jesus; they don’t follow the true teaching. Christ died for all so that those who live will no longer live for themselves but for him.²⁰ Paul was saying to stay away from anyone who doesn’t live like that.

Here’s another example:

“Do not let anyone deceive you by telling you things that are not true, because these things will bring God’s wrath on those who do not obey him. So do not associate with them.”²¹

Do not associate with anyone who claims to be a believer but teaches something opposite of what the Bible teaches – specifically because God’s wrath will come on those who don’t obey. If that’s the case, then how can Christians continue going to a church where they’re being told that they’re saved by believing the correct information and that they don’t have to obey what Jesus said to do? That’s not what the Bible teaches. What they’re teaching and living will bring God’s wrath on them

¹² 1 John 2:4

¹³ 1 John 2:9,11

¹⁴ 1 John 3:8,10

¹⁵ Ref. 1 John 2:18-29, 3:8,10

¹⁶ Romans 16:17-18

¹⁷ Ref. 1 John 3:11, 3:23; 2 John 4-6, 9

¹⁸ Ref. 1 John 3:16-18, 4:9-10; John 13:34, 15:12; 2 Corinthians 8:8-15; Philippians 2:1-8

¹⁹ Ref. 2 Corinthians 11:4

²⁰ Ref. 2 Corinthians 5:15

²¹ Ephesians 5:6-7

because they don't obey. Paul said, "Do not associate with them."

"Anyone who has a different teaching and does not agree with the true teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that promotes godliness – that person is full of pride and understands nothing, but is sick with a love for arguing and fighting about words. This brings jealousy, strife, slander, evil suspicions, and constant bickering from those who have corrupted minds and have lost the truth. They think that serving God is a way to make a profit."²²

Here, Paul wrote about people who have a different teaching that is not in line with the true teaching... what is the true teaching? Love. The true teaching promotes godliness. The true teaching is about living the right way. But Paul said these people are proud, they don't have understanding, they love debating and arguing over words, they bring jealousy, arguments, and constant fights. They have corrupted minds and don't have the truth. Why? Because they don't have love. They think that serving God is a way to make a profit.

Remember when you read passages like this one that this is written from God's perspective – not man's perspective.

You might not look at these people and automatically think they're full of pride and sick with a love for arguing and fighting. But based on God's definition of love – that God wants us to absolutely and completely no longer look out for ourselves, but live our lives looking out for one another, and put each other first – would God say that someone is proud? Would God say that someone loves debating and arguing? Would God say that someone thinks their ministry is a way to make a profit?

In a culture of salaried church staff, pastors, preachers, and Christian authors, that's a serious warning.

Paul added at the end of this description, "Withdraw from such people."²³ This last sentence is often not even included in many translations of the Bible. They just leave it out! But it's right there in the Greek, and it's in keeping with everything else Paul said about how to handle people like this. They are not true Christians. Therefore, you shouldn't join yourself to them. You shouldn't be one of them. You shouldn't keep meeting together with them. You shouldn't keep viewing them as true brothers and sisters.

If Christians have withdrawn from such people, telling them to go back to them is telling them to disobey the Bible. You can't just take one verse that says, "Do not neglect to meet together," and use it across the board. That misses the whole point of what the author was saying. That demonstrates a deep lack of wisdom and understanding. This is exactly what Paul meant when he 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."²⁴

If a pastor tells you to return to a church full of people who the Bible tells you to not associate with and withdraw from, then that pastor wants to be a teacher of the law, but he doesn't even understand what he's talking about. He's following human tradition.²⁵ He's getting his definitions from the Christian culture around him rather than from God and the Bible. There's no wisdom in that.

Here are still more examples:

"Stay away from foolish, useless talk and from the arguments of what is falsely called 'knowledge.' By saying they have that 'knowledge,' some have strayed their way from the true faith."²⁶

Paul said something similar in his second letter to Timothy:

"Stay away from foolish, useless talk, because that will lead people further away from God.

²² 1 Timothy 6:3-5

²³ Ref. 1 Timothy 6:5

²⁴ 1 Timothy 1:7

²⁵ Ref. Matthew 15:3-9

²⁶ 1 Timothy 6:20-21

Their evil teaching will spread like gangrene...²⁷

Paul told us to stay away from foolish talk and false teaching. The implication of that is clear: we shouldn't keep going to their meetings and participating in their religion. If they're calling themselves Christians, but are abandoning the teaching of the New Testament, they're not our brothers and sisters, and we shouldn't keep meeting with them and associating with them.

If they're teaching that you're saved by belief and that it's all dependent on whether or not you accept the right information, then they're teaching a false gospel. It's foolish. It's useless. It's evil teaching. It's not the message that promotes godliness; it's the message that promotes lawlessness. It promotes Christians thinking they can be saved and go to heaven without obeying the Law of Christ – without living in love, without doing what God wants, without doing what is right.²⁸

Paul said to stay away from this. It spreads. It's like gangrene.

If you keep sitting under their teaching, you'll never be able to see the truth – because every time you read the Bible, you'll read it through the lens of what a pastor or preacher told you it means. You'll read it through the lens of the gospel you were given by false teachers – by the antichrist. And this will keep you from being able to understand.

Their gangrene will spread to you.

False teaching is like gangrene; it's an infection inside the body. The true Church is the Body of Christ. If a body has a disease, you don't nourish the disease. You don't tell people to go back to the disease. You don't keep the disease in close proximity. You don't try to help the disease. You get it out; you kill it.

In the same way, the body of Christ must remove the evil. We cannot allow the gangrene to spread. We should stay away from their foolish talk. We should stay away from their false knowledge. We should have nothing to do with it.

John also taught the same thing as Paul:

“Anyone who goes beyond Christ's teaching and does not abide in it does not have God. But whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If someone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not greet that person or receive them into your house. If you welcome such a person, you participate in the evil work.”²⁹

John was clear: if someone isn't abiding in Christ's teaching (which John clearly explained is radical love),³⁰ then that person doesn't have God. And if someone claiming to be a brother or sister comes to you, but doesn't bring this teaching, you shouldn't so much as *greet* that person. You shouldn't receive that person into your home. John said the same thing Paul said: Don't meet with false believers. Do not associate with them. Remove the evil from among you. Let them be anathema! Do not even eat with them. Do not even greet them or welcome them into your home.

A lot of Christians don't really take these verses too seriously. But as we're seeing, this was taught repeatedly throughout the New Testament. It was serious enough for the apostles to mention over and over again. Clearly God takes it seriously.

Why is it so important for Christians to refuse to associate with, eat with, greet or welcome one of these false brothers? Because, as John said, if you associate with them or greet them, you're participating in their evil work. You're helping them. These people are leading others into destruction.³¹ People are dying because of them. Their disease is spreading. Paul called them servants

²⁷ 2 Timothy 2:16-17

²⁸ Ref. Romans 8:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2

²⁹ 2 John 9-11

³⁰ Ref. 1 John 2:9-11, 3:9-11, 3:13-18, 3:23, 4:7-12, 4:16-21, 5:1-3; 2 John 4-6; 3 John 5-8

³¹ Ref. Matthew 13:24-30; Ephesians 5:6-7; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; 2 Peter 2:1-22; Jude 3-15

of Satan.³² John called them the antichrist.³³ They're working for the enemy, and if we help them, we're joining them in working for the enemy.

Just because someone calls themselves a Christian doesn't mean they're living for God. Just because they call Jesus "Lord" doesn't mean they're doing his work.³⁴ The false prophets in Israel thought they were teaching the word of the Lord. The Pharisees thought they were doing God's work. False brothers and sisters think they're servants of the light. But they're not – they're servants of Satan.

Jesus said, "Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters."³⁵

If they're not doing what Jesus said to do, then they are working against Jesus. Even if they think they're working for him. God takes this seriously. God hates what they do. Unfortunately, Christians don't take it as seriously as God does.

Becoming a Christian is not just about choosing to live a life of love; it's choosing a side in an ongoing war. The Kingdom of God is at war with the kingdom of darkness. If people are fighting for the enemy, we cannot join them in their fight. If your king tells you to join a battle and fight, and you line up in the ranks of the enemy, you're not working for your king. You're a traitor.

When Christians help an apostate Church spread apostasy, they're betraying Jesus. When Christians join ranks with an apostate Church, sit under their teaching, associate with them, become members with them, and treat them as fellow believers, it doesn't matter if they're hoping to change something or trying to be a good influence. They're putting their stamp of approval on people who refuse to obey God. They're showing everyone around them that they think you can reject God's commands and still be a Christian. They're participating in the work of the enemy.

They're betraying Jesus.

We must keep ourselves separate. We must keep ourselves different. We must be holy. It doesn't mean you can't reach out to them. It doesn't mean you can't call them to repent and show them what it means to really follow Jesus. It doesn't mean you can't love them! But it does mean you stop participating in their evil work. You don't join their churches. You don't help them preach a false gospel. You don't become one of them. You don't join yourself to them.

Paul said, "Do not join yourselves to unbelievers. Good and bad do not belong together. Light and darkness cannot share together. How can Christ and Belial have any agreement? What can a believer share in common with a nonbeliever? What union can the temple of God have with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: 'I will live with them and walk with them. And I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from their midst, and be separate, says the Lord. Touch nothing that is unclean, and I will accept you.'"³⁶

Christians must begin recognizing fruit. We must start judging the Church.³⁷ We must begin to recognize that if someone claims that they know God, but they don't obey his commands, they're liars and the truth isn't in them.³⁸ We must recognize that, according to John, if someone says, "I am in the light," but they don't live a life of radical love, then they're still in darkness.³⁹ That means they're unbelievers. And we need to respond accordingly.

We cannot join ourselves to unbelievers. Good and bad don't belong together. Light and

³² Ref. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

³³ Ref. 1 John 2:18-29

³⁴ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 6:46; 2 Corinthians 11:4

³⁵ Luke 11:23

³⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:14-17

³⁷ Ref. 1 Corinthians 5:12-13

³⁸ Ref. 1 John 2:4

³⁹ Ref. 1 John 2:9-11

darkness cannot share together. If those false believers are “servants of Satan” and “the antichrist,”⁴⁰ then how can Christ and Belial have any agreement? What can a believer share in common with an unbeliever? If, as Paul said, they’re accepting a different Jesus, a different gospel, and a different spirit than what was taught in Scripture,⁴¹ then they’re accepting a different god – a false god, an idol.

What union can the temple of God have with idols?

God instructs us to come out from their midst and be separate. He tells us to touch nothing that is unclean. If we keep ourselves separate and touch nothing that is unclean, then he promises to accept us.

The Bible doesn’t just warn us about false believers and then leave it at that. It doesn’t just tell us the Church will fall away and become apostate and then leave it up to us what to do about it. No, the Bible tells us what to do. It tells us over and over again. We have everything we need in Scripture. It says to avoid those people. Remove the evil person among you. Do not associate with them. Withdraw from them. Stay away from them. Separate yourselves. Let them be anathema. Do not even eat with them. Do not greet them or welcome them into your home. Come out from their midst. Touch nothing that is unclean. Do not join yourselves to them.

We’re not commanded to keep meeting together with them.

When Hebrews told us to keep meeting together, it has a context. It was telling us to meet together in order to provoke one another to show radical love and do good deeds.⁴² It was telling us that we can’t deliberately go on sinning, or we’re not truly Christians.⁴³ It told us to persevere through sufferings, keep loving those who are suffering, and maintain joy through persecution without giving up.⁴⁴ It told us to not throw away our boldness, but to persevere with faith.⁴⁵ Then it told us about all the examples of people in Scripture who are witnesses testifying what real faith looks like – that it’s an action, not just a belief.⁴⁶

Hebrews wasn’t telling us to keep having some religious meeting.

It was telling us to live in radical love as the body of Jesus.

As we read through the Bible, it’s important to remember that Paul said the things that happened to the people in the Old Testament were written down as warnings for us – examples to us so that we don’t end up doing the same things they did.⁴⁷ So, when we read the stories in the Old Testament, we need to look for what those stories are teaching us – what do they tell us about what our lives should or should not look like?

There is one story in particular which is referenced a few times in the New Testament, but many Christians don’t fully understand what the story teaches. After God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, as they were wandering through the wilderness they came to the region of the Moabites and the Midianites.⁴⁸ The king of Moab, named Balak, was afraid of the Israelites because they had heard about the amazing things God had done for them. So, Balak hired a man named Balaam to curse Israel. But God told Balaam not to curse Israel. Balaam didn’t curse Israel; instead, he blessed them. Then he left.

The next time we read about Balaam is a several chapters later where he is listed among the

⁴⁰ Ref. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 John 2:18-29

⁴¹ Ref. 2 Corinthians 11:4

⁴² Ref. Hebrews 10:24-25

⁴³ Ref. Hebrews 10:26-31

⁴⁴ Ref. Hebrews 10:32-34

⁴⁵ Ref. Hebrews 10:35-39

⁴⁶ Ref. Hebrews 11:1-12:1

⁴⁷ Ref. 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11

⁴⁸ Ref. Numbers 22-24

dead after Israel went to war with the Midianites.⁴⁹ The Israelites had killed him. He hadn't cursed them; he has blessed them. But they killed him. Moses mentioned in passing that the Midianites had followed Balaam's advice and had turned the people of Israel away from the Lord.⁵⁰ He was referencing an event which is recorded in Numbers, but Balaam's name wasn't mentioned in that story.

However, if we look outside of the Old Testament at some of the other ancient Jewish texts we have available to us, we can see more of what Balaam did.

For example, Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived at the same time as the apostles, wrote that after God told Balaam not to curse Israel, Balaam still wanted to receive the money the Midianites offered him. So, Balaam told the Midianites that if they could get Israel to sin against God, God himself would punish Israel. He also told them how – if the Midianite women seduced the Israelite men, they could get those men to turn away from the Lord and worship the Midianite gods.⁵¹

This was something God had warned the Israelites about beforehand. He said, "Be careful that you don't make an agreement with the people who live in that land. When they worship their gods, they will invite you to join them. Then you will eat their sacrifices. If you take some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters worship gods, they will lead your sons to do the same thing."⁵²

This was the teaching of Balaam.

Essentially, Balaam taught the Midianites to intermingle and intermarry with Israel. Israel joined themselves to foreign women, and those foreign women led the people of Israel away from God. In New Testament terms, God's people joined themselves to unbelievers. They didn't keep themselves separate. And this led them astray. The leaven got in, and it began to spread.

It's the exact same warning Paul gave us about apostasy. If we don't keep the leaven out of the Church – if we join ourselves to unbelievers – the apostasy will spread, and people will be led astray. Balaam is mentioned numerous times throughout the New Testament. His story is a story we're supposed to remember. It's a warning for us today: Do not join yourselves to people who do not follow God, or they will lead you away from God.

When Peter wrote about false believers in the Church, he said, "These false teachers abandoned the right road and went astray, following the way Balaam went. Balaam, the son of Beor, loved being paid for doing wrong."⁵³

Jude also mentioned Balaam when describing false believers: "They have followed the way of Cain, and because of greed they have poured themselves out to doing the error that Balaam did."⁵⁴

When Jesus wrote a letter to the church in Pergamum, he said, "I have a few things against you: You have some there who follow the teaching of Balaam. He taught Balak how to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel by eating food offered to idols and by taking part in sexual sins... So repent. If you do not, I will come to you quickly and make war against them with the sword that comes out of my mouth."⁵⁵

The story of Balaam is a warning for us today. It's the same warning we see repeated all throughout the New Testament: Do not join yourselves to unbelievers. They will lead you into sin. They will lead you away from God. They will lead you into destruction. Notice how serious Jesus takes this. He said that if you follow what Balaam taught, he will come against you and make war against

⁴⁹ Ref. Numbers 31:8

⁵⁰ Ref. Numbers 31:15-16

⁵¹ Ref. Josephus' *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 4.6.6 - 4.6.13

⁵² Exodus 34:15-16

⁵³ 2 Peter 2:15

⁵⁴ Jude 11

⁵⁵ Revelation 2:14-16

you with the sword that comes out of his mouth.

In Numbers we see something similar as the result of Balaam's teaching.

The Israelites joined themselves to unbelievers and were led astray to worship false gods. The result was that God made war against them. He sent a plague, and twenty-four thousand people died. The only reason the plague stopped was because a man named Phinehas rose up and removed the evil person from among them. God commended him, saying, "He hates sin as much as I do."⁵⁶

God hates sin. We cannot join ourselves to people who are okay with sin. Sin simply means living contrary to the commands of God. We're commanded to live a radical lifestyle of love. We're commanded to abandon this world. We're commanded to be undistracted. We're commanded to make sure there are absolutely no needy people among us.

We're following the teaching of Balaam when we join ourselves to people who call themselves Christians but refuse to live this way. Jesus said if we do this, he will make war against us. That's not something we want!

Think about it this way:

When Paul proclaimed the Gospel, he always made sure to go to the Jews first.⁵⁷

Why? Because they were God's people. They were God's chosen people. They were the ones God had called. And the only reason they were not his people anymore is because they were unfaithful; so, Paul went to them and called them to repent and follow God. Paul went to their synagogues and preached the truth. But Paul didn't tell them to keep attending their synagogues and stay joined to all the other Jews who rejected the truth. No. They followed Paul out of the synagogues. Paul taught them to start meeting with one another – to form their own group. They stopped going to the synagogues. They stopped associating with those who claimed to be God's people, but who had rejected God's truth about how we should live.

As we've seen throughout this series, if the Church today looks like the Jews in the New Testament period, the same concept applies. Leave the "synagogues." Meet with one another – with other true Christians who want to live radically for God, following the commands we have in Scripture.

The teaching of the New Testament is clear: If we see people who call themselves believers, but they're not living the way Jesus taught to live, our response should be to separate, to stay away, to not even eat with them, to not even greet them, to not welcome them into our homes.

This was what the apostles taught to all the early churches in the first century. True Christians must keep themselves separate from false Christians. They must not associate with apostasy. The Church is supposed to stay separate.

But that's not what the Church did.

As we saw in the last video, something big happened shortly after Paul died. Apostasy flooded the Church. Gangrene entered the body. The leaven got in, and it spread. The whole batch of dough began to rise.

Things today are vastly different than they were when Paul wrote his letters. Today, it's not just one or two people who are living in apostasy and need to be removed from the Church. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he told them to remove the evil person from among them. But today, apostasy is by far the majority. You can't remove the false believer from among you. The only thing you really could do is remove yourself from among them.

Things seem a bit different. But the same concept applies.

The apostles warned us that apostasy was coming; they warned us that the Church was going

⁵⁶ Numbers 25:10

⁵⁷ Ref. Romans 1:16; Acts 13:5, 13:14-43, 14:1, 17:2, 17:17, 18:4-8, 18:19, 19:8

to fall away. Paul said it was coming “in the last days.”⁵⁸ For us to understand what to do about rampant apostasy in the Church today, we need to understand what the phrase “in the last days” meant when Paul used it.

So, let’s look at a little bit of background quickly...

The phrase “in the last days” is a phrase often misunderstood by Christians today. They think “the last days” refers to only the last few years before Jesus returns. They think of the *Left Behind* series. They picture seven years of terrible times right before Jesus returns. But that’s a mindset Christians only have because they read their own ideas into the text. They don’t understand the worldview of the original audience, and how the original audience would have understood what Paul said.

The phrase “the last days” was a phrase often used during the time of the early Church. It was a phrase that came from their worldview. In the ancient Jewish worldview, they believed that the world would exist for 6,000 years. Those 6,000 years would represent the 6 days of creation, because as Moses said, “To the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day.”⁵⁹

So, they believed that the world would exist for 6,000 years, which would represent the six days of creation. So, every thousand years is one day. They believed there would be 2,000 years (i.e., two days) from creation until Abraham (which there were). They called it “the era of desolation.” Then they believed there would be 2,000 years (i.e., two days) from Abraham until the Messiah (which there were). They called this “the era of Torah.” Then, they anticipated 2,000 years (i.e., two days) of what was called the “Messianic Era.” This was the worldview of the Jews – even the ones who didn’t accept Jesus.

The Messiah arrived right when they were expecting. But they didn’t accept who he was. They expected the Messiah to come at that time because that was the end of the Era of Torah and the beginning of the Messianic Era. And they anticipated 2,000 years of the Messianic Era.

Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, we see one more day added – a day of rest coinciding with the seventh day of creation. Revelation says that the devil will be imprisoned for a thousand years and Christ will reign with his people.⁶⁰

When the writers of the New Testament referred to “the last days,” they were referring to those last two days of creation – the last two days before the day of rest. In other words, they were referring to the Messianic Era – the entire time-period that has existed between Jesus’ first coming, and when he eventually returns. That entire period is called “the last days.”

This is why the apostles referred to the time they lived in as the last days.⁶¹ The Messiah came during their lifetime. The Messianic Era had begun. The Last Days had begun. They lived in the last days. And today, we still live in the last days.

Why is all this important?

Because Paul told us what to expect during the last days – during the age of the Messiah, during the time-period between Jesus’ first coming and his second coming. Paul told us what to expect. He told us what the Church would look like, and he told us how to respond.

We need to come to grips with the fact that he was talking about the time-period we live in. He wasn’t describing a future “end times” scenario that we’re still waiting for. He was talking about everything that’s happened in the last two thousand years. He was talking about the time-period we currently live in. He was warning us. He was describing what the Church looks like today. And he told us how we’re supposed to respond.

This is what Paul said: “Know this! In the last days there will be terrible times, because people

⁵⁸ Ref. 2 Timothy 3:1-9

⁵⁹ 2 Peter 3:8 which is quoting Psalm 90:4

⁶⁰ Ref. Revelation 20:1-6

⁶¹ Ref. Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Peter 1:20; 1 John 2:18; Jude 16

will love themselves, love money, brag, and be proud. They will say evil things against others and will not obey their parents or be grateful or be holy. They will not love others, will refuse to forgive, will slander, and will not control themselves. They will be cruel, will not love what is good, will be traitors, and will be reckless. They will be conceited, will love pleasure instead of God, having an appearance of godliness but will not have its power. Avoid these people.”⁶²

Remember, Paul told the Corinthians that when he said to not associate with people who live a certain way, he was not referring to those in the world – he was referring to those who call themselves believers and live that way. Therefore, this description in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 is a description of the Church. This is what the Church will look like in the last days. It will be terrible times.

Paul was saying it would no longer be one or two people who are living in apostasy and need to be removed from the Church. No, Paul was saying that apostasy would define the Church. The Church would be filled with people who live for themselves and think they’re living for the Lord. The Church would look just like ancient Israel when they rebelled against God. Paul was describing what the Church would look like throughout the last days.

If we live in the “last days,” then Paul was describing what the Church looks like *today*. If you understand what “the last days” meant in the worldview of Second Temple Judaism, then either this is an accurate description of how God currently views the Church... or Paul was a false prophet and nothing he wrote should even be considered Scripture.

But, if you understand what the commands of Jesus were, and what kind of lifestyle God wants his people to live, then it becomes clear... Paul’s description is spot on.

Just like Israel didn’t recognize their apostasy because, from their perspective, they didn’t think they had abandoned God... in the same way, many Christians don’t recognize that Paul was describing the Church today because, from their perspective, they don’t think this is an accurate description of Christians today.

But the Bible isn’t written from a human perspective. It’s written from God’s perspective. Paul’s description of the Church in the last days is an accurate description of the Church today because it’s God’s description from God’s perspective. The Church is full of people who don’t live in radical love. They don’t obey the commands of God. They look out for their own interests. They focus their lives around making money and having the kind of life they want. They don’t control their own desires. They don’t share everything with brothers and sisters. They love pleasure. They lack the power of God – both the transforming power that makes us new people, and the power of the Kingdom that Jesus promised. His description is spot-on.

So, what do we do???

As people who want to live for the Lord, obeying his commands, seeking first the Kingdom, abandoning the things of this world, and living in radical love, what do we do about the current status of the Church?

I’ve heard pastors tell people to keep going to church. I’ve heard Christians say they think they’re called to keep attending churches even though those churches are full of people who don’t obey the commands of God. I’ve heard believers say that it’s more important to meet together than it is to make sure we’re meeting with people who are living the right way.

But these are all just human traditions.⁶³ These are human ideas.

The Bible tells us what to do: Touch nothing that is unclean. Be separate. Withdraw from them. Stay away from them. Let them be anathema. Do not associate with them. Do not join yourself to them. Do not even greet them. Do not even eat with them. Do not welcome them into your home. Avoid them.

⁶² 2 Timothy 3:1-5

⁶³ Ref. Matthew 15:3-9

Ep. 24 – Why Did Paul Say to Avoid People?

This is the response the Bible instructs us to have. It doesn't say it just once. It says it over and over and over.

But so many Christians don't want to do it. They completely ignore these commands. They don't even think about them.

Why?

Because it doesn't seem right to them. It doesn't seem "loving."

But it's what the Bible says. If it doesn't seem right to you, or loving to you, but it's what the Bible says, then something is wrong with *you* – not the Bible. Something is wrong with your understanding or your definitions. We can't just ignore Bible verses because we don't like them.

And we can't just follow some argument about why we shouldn't do what the Bible clearly says to do. Is the Bible your standard, or is someone's argument your standard? The Bible says false teachers will try to persuade people with arguments that seem good but are false.⁶⁴ If we build our lives around what *seems* right rather than what the Bible says to do, then we're not actually following the Bible. We're following ourselves. We've made ourselves gods. We do what's right in our own eyes. Not what's right in God's eyes.

The Bible tells us that we need to be obeying the commands of Jesus.⁶⁵ The Bible tells us what those commands are.⁶⁶ The Bible tells us that loving him means we obey him.⁶⁷ The Bible tells us that anyone who doesn't obey him isn't really a Christian.⁶⁸ And the Bible tells us what to do when people call themselves Christians, yet don't obey him.⁶⁹

We have all our instructions. The only question is: Will we do it even if we don't like it?

Many Christians see problems in the Church, and they try to help. They try to change things. They get involved and try to make changes from the inside. I get it – we want to see those people change. But that's not what the Bible told us to do. The Bible told us to stay separate. The Bible told us to stay holy. The Bible told us to be different. If we want to actually help those people, we need to do it the way Jesus told us to do it – even if it doesn't make sense to us, and even if it seems foolish from a natural perspective.

Naturally, it makes sense to get involved and try to change things! But that wasn't what we were told to do. Jesus cares more about us shining as a light to those people. We can only shine if we're different. He knows what's best for us, and he knows what's best for them. What's best is for us to be separate and be different. And what's best for them is for us to shine as a light to them.

When Christians get involved in these churches and try to solve these problems, they're usually not recognizing the real issue: Those people don't love God. Jesus said that if we love him, we will obey him, and that only those who obey him actually love him.⁷⁰

John told us that loving God means obeying his commands.⁷¹ And he was very careful to tell us what those commands are.⁷² So, if those people aren't obeying the commands of God to live a life defined by the radical love of Jesus, then those people don't love God. They love themselves. They love money. They love pleasure. They're following the pattern Paul warned us about.

Most modern churches are full of people who don't love God – even though they think they

⁶⁴ Ref. Colossians 2:4

⁶⁵ Ref. Matthew 7:15-27, 25:31-46; Luke 6:46; John 8:31; 12:47-50; 1 John 2:3-6, 3:24

⁶⁶ Ref. John 13:34, 15:12; 1 John 3:11, 3:16-18, 4:7-12, 4:16, 4:19-21; 2 John 5-6; 3 John 5-8

⁶⁷ Ref. John 14:15, 14:21, 14:23; 1 John 5:3

⁶⁸ Ref. 1 John 1:5-7, 2:4, 2:9-11, 2:15, 3:6, 3:7-10, 3:16-18, 4:8, 4:20-21

⁶⁹ Ref. Matthew 15:13-14; 1 Corinthians 5:6-13; Galatians 1:8-9; Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 5:6-7; 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:16-17, 3:1-5; 2 John 9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14-16

⁷⁰ Ref. John 14:15, 21, 23

⁷¹ Ref. 1 John 5:3

⁷² Ref. John 13:34, 15:12; 1 John 3:11, 3:16-18, 4:7-12, 4:16, 4:19-21; 2 John 5-6; 3 John 5-8

do. They've redefined *loving God* into having feelings, emotions, singing songs, and spending time with him. But the Bible says that loving God means we obey him. So, if those people don't obey God, then they don't love God. And if they don't love God, then when Christians get involved in their churches and try to change things, they're actually trying to solve a problem that they're not able to solve. The problem isn't that those people need to mature. The problem is that those people aren't saved. That's why we're told to not associate with them.

It doesn't mean we don't evangelize to them. It doesn't mean we don't shine as a light to them. It doesn't mean we don't try to influence them from the outside. But it does mean we don't become one of them. Jude said, "Rescue others by snatching them from the fire. Show mercy mixed with fear to others, hating even their clothes which are stained by the flesh."⁷³

We want to show mercy to others. We want to rescue them from the fire. But we should also hate even their clothes which are stained by sin. Or, as Paul said, we should touch nothing that is unclean. We can't join them. We can't unite with them. If, as Jude said, these people are in the fire, then we need to start recognizing what we're actually doing: we're rescuing them from destruction.

Essentially, recognize that they're not Christians, and stop treating them like they are! As a Christian, would you go to a Muslim mosque because you feel the need to meet together? Of course not! It's a totally different religion. Meeting with them is not what Hebrews was telling us to do.

But the Bible tells us that apostate Christianity is a completely different religion, too.

Paul said they believe a different gospel, they accepted a different Jesus, and they received a different spirit.⁷⁴ Meeting with them and joining with them is an attempt to mix light with darkness. It's an attempt to join Christ and Belial together. The New Testament tells us time and time again to have nothing to do with people who call themselves Christians but live contrary to the commands of God.

But Christians reject what the Bible says. They don't want to live like that. Christians don't want to do this because they don't think it's loving. But that's only because they still think *love* means *being nice*.

Jesus wasn't nice when he drove the Pharisees out of the Temple with a whip.⁷⁵ Jesus wasn't nice when he called the Pharisees and Scribes hypocrites and blind guides who lead people into destruction.⁷⁶ Paul wasn't being nice when he called false brothers "servants of Satan" who "masquerade as servants of righteousness."⁷⁷ He wasn't being nice when he named Hymenaeus and Philetus by name and said that their teaching is like gangrene in the body.⁷⁸ Peter wasn't being nice when he called false brothers "ignorant," "unstable," and "lawless."⁷⁹ John wasn't being nice when he called them "the antichrist" or "children of the devil."⁸⁰ Jude wasn't being nice when he called them "twice dead."⁸¹

Love isn't about being nice; love is about doing what is best for others.

The Bible tells us that apostate Christians are not Christians at all. They're still dead. They're still lost. They're still in darkness. They need a light. Christians are not being a light if they join themselves to the darkness. Christians are only being a light if they're different than the darkness.

So, be different. Shine. Show them another way – don't join them in their way and merely tell

⁷³ Jude 23

⁷⁴ Ref. 2 Corinthians 11:4

⁷⁵ Ref. Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-17

⁷⁶ Ref. Matthew 15:7, 15:14, 23:17, 23:24, 23:26-27; Luke 12:1

⁷⁷ Ref. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

⁷⁸ Ref. 2 Timothy 2:16-18

⁷⁹ Ref. 2 Peter 3:16-17

⁸⁰ Ref. 1 John 2:18-29; 3:9-10; 2 John 7

⁸¹ Ref. Jude 12

them about another way. Remember, when Paul preached the gospel, he would go to the synagogues first – to the Jews first.⁸² The reason he did that was because he was going first to God’s people who were unfaithful. He was going to God’s people who had committed apostasy. We must remember today when we try to reach these people – that’s what we’re doing. It’s evangelism. It’s not telling them they are evil, wicked, and horrible; it’s not hating them. It’s evangelizing. They are the lost sheep. They are wandering in the darkness. They’ve been taught the wrong thing. We need to love them. But we need to remember that evangelism for us is often going to look like going to the apostate people who have been taught the wrong things and are on the path to destruction and showing them the truth. A lot of them are not going to accept it. But some of them will.

We need to keep from getting angry and hating them because we think we’re better than them. They are lost and they need their shepherd. They are in the darkness and they need light. We need to remember when we talk to them and try to reach them that what we’re doing is evangelism. What we’re doing is what Paul did when he went to the synagogues. He went to the Jews first. We need to go to the Christians first. We need to call them to repent – not out of anger or superiority, but because the Bible says that people must obey Jesus, but they’re being taught that they must believe – and that obedience is not important. We need to show them the truth because that’s what love does.

We must love them. We cannot approach them with hatred or anger or some superiority complex. We must approach them with love. But we also must be firm and stand for the truth. We need to learn how to walk that fine line between the two. We’re not at all supposed to hate them. We’re supposed to love them – and, *loving them* means doing what’s best for them – whether they want or not.

It is not love to join them. It is not love to help them preach a false gospel. It is not love to allow them to keep thinking they’re on a road to life when they’re really on a road to destruction. Loving them means separating yourself and shining. It means being different so they can see the difference between what God says is good and what God says is evil.

Jesus said, “You are the light that gives light to the world. A city that is built on a hill cannot be hidden. And people don’t light a lamp and then hide it under a basket. They put it on a lampstand so the light shines for all the people in the house. In the same way let your light shine for people to see, so that they will see the good things you do and will praise your Father in heaven.”⁸³

Do not hide your light under a basket by joining yourself to darkness. Let your light shine by staying separate. Let your light shine by being different. Let your light shine by refusing to compromise.

First and foremost, we’re called to love “one another;” that means other true believers. Paul said, “When we have the opportunity to help anyone, we should do it. But we should give special attention to those who are in the family of faith.”⁸⁴

The Church is supposed to be a community of people who look out for one another instead of themselves. It’s supposed to be a community of people who have no needs whatsoever because everyone is meeting the needs of the other people, and no one is living in excess.⁸⁵

It’s supposed to be like an ant colony: Every ant in the colony works hard for the good of the whole colony. No ant is just looking out for himself. It works because every ant is doing it – every ant is living that way! In the kingdom of God, it works because everyone who is full of the Spirit will do it. But it requires that everyone does it. It requires that everyone lives that way, looks out for the good

⁸² Ref. Romans 1:16; Acts 13:5, 13:14-43, 14:1, 17:2, 17:17, 18:4-8, 18:19, 19:8

⁸³ Matthew 5:14-16

⁸⁴ Galatians. 6:10

⁸⁵ Ref. Deuteronomy 14:28-29, 15:7-11; Luke 12:33; Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-35; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15; Philippians 2:1-8

of others, and builds up the body rather than looking out for themselves and making sure their own needs are met. Yes, we should help those outside the Church too, when we're able. But first and foremost, we should help those within the true Church.

If those within the true Church begin to live this way – separating themselves from those who refuse to live this way, and joining themselves to those who accept this radical lifestyle – then the world will see this true Church as a community of people defined by a radical love no one else has ever witnessed. They will see a community of people looking out for one another as a higher priority than themselves. They will see a community of people where no one has any needs whatsoever. They will see a community of people who begin to encounter the power of God's Kingdom. A light will begin to shine in the darkness.⁸⁶ As Jesus said, "All people will know that you are my followers if you love one another."⁸⁷

And he also prayed, "Father, I ask that they can be one. As you are in me, and I am in you, I ask that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. I have given these people the glory that you gave me so that they can be one, just as you and I are one. I in them and you in me so that they will be in perfect unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them just as much as you loved me."⁸⁸

If we love one another, all people will know we're his followers. If we are in perfect unity like the first Church in Acts,⁸⁹ then the world will believe that the Father sent Jesus and that the Father loves us just as much as he loves Jesus. This cannot happen if we're joined to people who won't participate. This cannot happen if we're joined to people who refuse to accept the lifestyle Jesus taught. If we stay joined to the false church, all people will not know that we're his followers... because we won't look any different than anyone else. There will be no love. There will be no light.

I challenge anyone who wants to truly live for the Lord: find other true believers who are willing to live radically. They're out there. Many of them feel as lonely as you do. Find them. Find them by talking to people. Find them by challenging the status quo. Find them by talking to everyone. Rock the boat. Learn who is willing to get on board and who is not. The truth sets people free. The truth gives them life. So, don't keep it quiet.

Paul said, "It is written in the Scriptures, 'I believed, so I spoke.' Our faith is like this, too. We also believe, and so we speak."⁹⁰

When you speak, expect some persecution. The New Testament is clear: if you want to live the right way, you will be persecuted.⁹¹ The prophets were persecuted – but remember, they were persecuted by "God's people." Jesus was persecuted by "God's people." The early Church was, first and foremost, persecuted by "God's people." Expect it to be the same today. Most Christians won't accept the truth. Most Christians won't like what you have to say.

But, as you begin to speak the truth, hopefully you'll also find other true believers. Perhaps you'll convert some false believers into being real Christians. When you do, meet with them. Become one with them. Join forces with them. Become a family. Share everything in common. Stand strong with one mind and one heart like Acts says we should.⁹²

But only meet together with true believers who build their lives around what the Bible says. Only join yourselves with people who have accepted the extraordinary, radical lifestyle that Jesus and

⁸⁶ Ref. John 13:35, 17:20-23; Philipians 1:27-28

⁸⁷ John 13:35

⁸⁸ John 17:21-23

⁸⁹ Ref. Acts 4:32-35

⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:13

⁹¹ Ref. Matthew 5:10-12, 10:16-20, 24:9-13; Luke 6:22-23, 6:26, 21:12-19; John 15:18-21, 16:1-4; Acts 14:21-22; Romans 8:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4; 2 Timothy 2:12, 3:12

⁹² Ref. Acts 4:32-35; Philipians 1:27-28

the apostles preached. Only become family with people who truly seek first the Kingdom in everything they do. Only become one with people who have truly died and risen again with Jesus. Start judging the trees by their fruit.

Stop accepting anything less. Stop joining yourselves to darkness. Stop trying to be one with people who prove by their actions that they hate God. And if someone joins but then proves through their actions that they're not living this way, and they're not going to repent, remove the leaven. Remove the evil person among you.

Apostasy swept through the Church nearly two thousand years ago. Paul warned us that the last days would be terrible times because of the apostasy of the Church – because the Church would become a dead Church and God's people would refuse to obey God. His prediction has proven to be true. For nearly two thousand years, the Church has led wars, slaughtered millions, accumulated wealth, acquired comfort, and neglected the needy. For nearly two thousand years, the Church has been filled with people who look out for their own interests above the interests of others.

These are the last days. Christians need to recognize it. They need to judge a tree by its fruit. They need to separate themselves.

The gates of Hell cannot stand against the Church.⁹³ But it has to be the real Church – the real congregation of God's people, the real bride of Christ, the real body of Christ, the real Temple of God.

Here is a secret: Jesus and John both said that those who claim to be children of God, but don't obey his commands, are actually children of the devil.⁹⁴ Our King stood up and issued a challenge to the devil and his children:

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days... the temple Jesus meant was his own body.”⁹⁵

The children of the devil accepted his challenge. The children of the devil destroyed God's Temple. The children of the devil killed the body of Christ.

But the “last days” are nearly over.

The third day is about to dawn.

⁹³ Ref. Matthew 16:18

⁹⁴ Ref. John 8:42-44; 1 John 3:7-10

⁹⁵ John 2:19, 21