

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 12 – Lies Christians Believe About Worldliness

In the last video, I mentioned that someone might tell me they want to build a tiny house. But if that person doesn't have the finances for it, and I can see that they're spending their money on other things, I can tell that they don't actually want to live in a tiny house. They might think they want to; they might dream about it; it might seem really cool to them; but if they're not working toward it, they must not really want it... If they're spending their money on movies, restaurants, video games, music, fashion, cars, iPhones, or anything else like that, it shows that those things are their priority. It shows that that person wants those things more than they want a tiny house.

We met someone recently who was really honest about how this concept applied to him. He said that he really wants to have a garden and grow all his own food. But, when he gets home from work in the evenings, he often finds himself sitting on the couch and drinking a beer. If he just chose to go plant a garden one time instead of drinking a beer, he would already have that garden by now! And he admitted it. He said, "I guess that means what I really want is to sit around and drink a beer. I guess I don't really want a garden."

The Kingdom of God is the tiny house. The Kingdom of God is the garden.

Our actions speak louder than our words.

So many Christians think they care about the Kingdom of God... but their daily lives show that they're not working toward the Kingdom. Their lifestyle shows that they want other things more than they want God.

Christians say they want the Kingdom of God, but they spend their money and time at the movies. They say they believe God wants us to feed the hungry, but they spend their money eating out at restaurants – feeding themselves at five to ten times the cost it would take to eat at home – instead of using that money to feed other people, like God wants. They say they "delight in the Lord," but they spend their time and money on games, sports, hobbies, and other entertainment. They say they want to seek first the Kingdom, but they watch TV for hours every day.

The list goes on and on...

Why do Christians spend so much money on music? Why do they think it's so important to be fashionable and stylish? Why do they buy cars that are more fun than they are practical? For that matter, why do they spend tens of thousands of dollars to get a car when they could get one just as practical for a fraction of the price? Why do they seem to always need the newest iPhone or Android? Why do they need the best technology and the newest Xbox? Why do they spend so much time trying to have fun and pleasure? Why do they think it's okay to build giant fancy homes or buy the best houses in the best neighborhoods? Why do they pour so much money into decorating their homes and making their houses look nice? Why do they spend so much money on vacations?

In short, if Christians really want the Kingdom of God so much, why are they spending all their time, money, and energy to enjoy the things of the world?

They say with their lips that they want the Kingdom of God. But their actions prove that they want this world.

We're all familiar with the verse that says, "Do not love the world or the things in the world.

If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you.”¹

Christians need to pay close attention to the warning John gave us here. Do you take it seriously? If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you. That means you’re not saved. That means you’re not really a Christian. That means you think you’re alive, but you’re dead.

We know we’re not supposed to love the world. We know we’re not supposed to love the things in the world. So, what part of not loving the world or the things in the world do Christians not understand? Why do Christians think it’s acceptable to pursue the American dream?

Christians do these things because they think they can do these things without loving the world. They don’t understand that their *actions* show what they love – not their words. In other words, doing these things is, in and of itself, what it means to love the world.

Just because you say you don’t love money doesn’t mean you don’t love money. Just because you think you don’t love money doesn’t mean you don’t love money. What you *do* with your money shows whether you love it or not. If you spend it on yourself, you love it. If you spend it on yourself, you love yourself. Because as we’ve talked about in this series – love is not a feeling or a thought. It’s an action. Your love is what you do. It’s what you prioritize. So, if your money is spent on yourself, then you love money and you love yourself.

That’s how God defines it.

This is why the early Church was described as living simply.² They didn’t accumulate possessions, they didn’t try to be fashionable, they didn’t spend money on vacations, they didn’t have huge homes... they didn’t live in excess! They used their excess to meet the needs of others. More than that – they simplified their own lives so they would have more to give to others! If they had lived any other way, they would have proven that they loved money more than the brothers and sisters, and they would have proven that they loved themselves more than the brothers and sisters. In fact, that’s why Ananias and Saphira died.³ They loved money, they loved themselves, and they thought they could lie to God about it.

This is also why, when Paul described the apostasy of the Church, he said, “...people will love themselves, love money... they will not love others... they will love pleasure instead of God.”⁴

Christians don’t seem to recognize that this is an exact description of the Church today. Remember, Paul was describing a Church that is deceived. The New Testament is full of warnings that people will be deceived. That means they won’t know they love themselves. They won’t know they love money. They won’t know they don’t love others. And they won’t know they love pleasure instead of God.

Why? Because they changed the meanings of all those words! They think they don’t love themselves because they think it’s all about a feeling, or about being a “narcissist.” They think they don’t love money because they’re not rich (often just because they’re spending it!), and they think loving money means being rich and always trying to have more. They think they do love others because they love them with the same kind of love the world has for others. And they think they don’t love pleasure instead of God, because they think they can love both pleasure and God.

But James said the opposite:

“You want things so you can use them for your own pleasures. You adulterers! Don’t you know that loving the world is the same as hating God? Anyone who wants to be a friend of the world becomes God’s enemy. Do you think the Scripture means nothing that says, ‘The Spirit that God made to live in us wants us for himself alone?’ ... So give yourselves completely to God... You who

¹ 1 John 2:15

² Ref. Acts 2:46

³ Ref. Acts 5:1-11

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:1-4

are trying to follow God and the world at the same time, make your thinking pure.”⁵

James didn’t say that being consciously enamored and infatuated with the world is the same as hating God. But that’s what most Christians seem to think it means to love the world. He didn’t say that you have to be aware of the fact that you love the world in order for it to be adultery. He didn’t say that you have to consciously hate God in order to hate God and be his enemy.

What James said is: if you want things for your own pleasure, you’re an adulterer, you love the world, you hate God, and you’re God’s enemy.

Wanting pleasure is adultery. That’s a serious warning. James wasn’t just using a flamboyant word to get your attention. *Adultery* is a biblical word. It’s the same word God used to describe Israel at the height of their apostasy.⁶ It’s the same word God used to describe Israel when he told them, “You are not my people, and I am not your God.”⁷

James knew what he was saying. He was very careful with his words. He was saying, “If you want things for your own pleasure, you’re apostate.”

Paul described apostasy, and James described adultery, and they both said the same thing: If the Church is filled with people who spend their time, money, and energy on themselves, it’s apostate. If they fill their lives with pleasure and comfort instead of building their lives around the Kingdom of God, they’re adulterers. If the Church is full of people who refuse to live simply and think it’s okay to pursue a higher standard of living for themselves, they’re not God’s people.

But this is the description of the Church today.

Christians have made loving the world acceptable. They think they can serve God and love the world at the same time because they’ve come up with their own ideas about what it means to serve God, and they’ve come up with their own ideas about what it means to love the world. They’ve made up their own standards, and then measured themselves by those standards.⁸

James didn’t mince his words. He wanted Christians to feel really uncomfortable if they’re saying they love God, but they’re spending their time and money doing the opposite of what he said. If a Christian says they love God – if they go to church, read their Bible, sing worship songs, pray, go on missions trips, tithe regularly, talk about God, evangelize, and even feel really deep affection for God – but, they spend their free time watching TV, watching movies, listening to music, reading novels, watching sports, they spend their money on things for themselves, going out to eat, getting a nice car, getting a nice house, decorating their home, getting the newest phones and computers, going on vacations, wearing the best clothes, or anything else that the world offers – if they say they love God but they’re doing those things, then they don’t actually love God. They love themselves. They love pleasure. They love this world. They love money. They’re adulterers. They hate God. They’re his enemies.

Loving the world is the same as hating God. It makes you his enemy.

Jesus said the same thing: “No servant can serve two masters. The servant will hate one master and love the other, or will be devoted to one master and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and worldly riches.”⁹

It’s not just “you can’t love both.” He was saying, “if you love one, you hate the other.” If you love worldly riches, you hate God. And if you truly love God, you will hate worldly riches. That’s what James was saying.

After James gave this warning about hating God, he continued, explaining that God wants you

⁵ James 4:3-5,7,8

⁶ Ref. Jeremiah 3:8-10, 5:7-9, 9:2, 13:25-27

⁷ Hosea 1:9

⁸ Ref. 2 Corinthians 10:12

⁹ Luke 16:13

for himself alone. He doesn't want to share you. He is a jealous God. So, give yourself to him completely. That means you aren't divided – you have fidelity; you have loyalty. Your entire life and all your actions show that the Kingdom of God is the only thing you care about.

If you say you want a tiny house, but you spend your time, money, and energy doing other things, you prove you *don't* want a tiny house. And if you say you love God and want his Kingdom, but you spend your time, money, and energy doing other things, you prove you do not want his Kingdom. You cannot be divided. Stop trying to follow God and the world at the same time – because you can't.

Loving the world is not about what you think you love, what you feel like you love, or what you say you love. Loving the world is about what you do with your time, money, and energy. John said, "If you love the world, the love of the Father is not in you." Why? Because you cannot spend your time, money, and energy on the things of this world and the pleasures of this world, and also spend your time, money, and energy on the things of God. You cannot live in excess and also live simply. You cannot sell your possessions and give to the poor and also spend your money on yourself.

As we've talked about in this series, we are saved by faith, but in Greek the word translated *faith* means fidelity. It means loyalty. It means reliability. It means faithfulness. It means you both believe and you obey at the same time; the word never meant just believing. That's what James was getting at. You must have fidelity to God. If you don't have fidelity, you're God's enemy – you're not saved, because we're saved by fidelity; we're saved by loyalty. If you are not loyal to God and God alone, if you are trying to share yourself with both God and the world, you don't have faith, you don't have fidelity, and you're not saved. You're still God's enemy. And, according to James, you are an adulterer, because you are cheating on God – you say you love God, but you love the world with your actions. That's adultery. According to James, that means you hate God.

In our English Bibles, when James said, "do not doubt"¹⁰ it actually should be translated "do not waver," or "do not go back and forth between two things." People think it means *doubt* because they think *faith* means *believing*, and therefore, *wavering* would mean *doubting*. But in Greek, *faith* doesn't mean *believing*. So, *wavering* or "going back and forth between two things" isn't about believing either. It's about your loyalties.

You can't waver between God and the world.

You can't go back and forth between loving God and loving his enemy.

You need to be faithful. You need fidelity. Your priorities need to be on the Kingdom of God, and you need to stop thinking about the things of this life. This is something found repeatedly throughout the New Testament...

When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life, Jesus said, "There is one more thing you need to do. Go and sell everything you have, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me."¹¹

Most Christians are familiar with this story. But if asked if they are supposed to sell their possessions, most Christians would say, "No." Christians today think Jesus was just making a point. They think he took this as a teaching opportunity to explain to people that you can't love God and love money (and of course when they say that, they mean, "You can't love God and also consciously and knowingly love money and be greedy.")

But that's not what was happening here. Jesus wasn't just making a point. The rich young ruler was a real dude. This isn't a parable. It's a story about a real guy who came to Jesus, asking him how he could have life. This was a real, historical man who was searching for salvation.

Jesus gave him an answer that turned him away.

¹⁰ Ref. James 1:6-8

¹¹ Mark 10:21

Jesus gave him an answer that would turn most modern Christians away.

This wasn't merely some teaching opportunity. Jesus wasn't exaggerating to make a point. A lot of Christians seem to think that this wasn't something Jesus expected all his followers to do. They assume that if Jesus wanted all his followers to live this way, he would have told all his followers to do this... not just the rich young ruler. But... the rich young ruler was *not* the only person who Jesus said this to:

“Jesus said to his followers... ‘Sell your possessions and give to the poor.’”¹²

So, Jesus didn't just say this to the rich young ruler. He said this to his followers. The rich young ruler wasn't merely an opportunity to make a point; it wasn't something only that one guy was told to do. It was something Jesus was telling everyone to do. It's what he expected his followers to do. It's what he expects us to do. It's what he taught.

It's what John the Baptist taught when he explained what repentance means.¹³ It's what we see Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector, doing when he repented.¹⁴ It's what we see the early Church doing in the book of Acts.¹⁵ It's what John was saying when he told us not to love the world or the things in the world.¹⁶ It's what James was saying when he told us that if we want things for our own pleasure, we're adulterers.¹⁷ It's what Paul was saying when he said that the apostate Church will love money, love themselves, and love pleasure.¹⁸

Jesus also warned us that if we fail to hear and obey this, if we keep our possessions, enjoy the things of this life, and love the pleasures and comforts of this life, then we are incapable of bearing good fruit...

Most Christians are familiar with the parable of the sower. In that parable, the farmer goes out to sow some seed and he throws the seed on a bunch of different kinds of soil; but only one of those locations ever ends up bearing fruit. Jesus said that some of the seed is sown among the weeds, and this is how Jesus later described the seed sown among the weeds:

“The seed that fell among the thorny weeds is like those who hear God's teaching, but they let the worries, riches, and pleasures of this life choke them and they do not produce good fruit.”¹⁹

Jesus was warning us about the worries, riches, and pleasures of this life. Those worries, riches, and pleasures are the weeds. They will choke you and keep you from producing good fruit. In short, are you focused on the things this life offers you to enjoy, or are you focused on what God offers? Is your time and money spent on the pleasures of this life, or is your time and money spent on the Kingdom of God? Did you receive the word and bear fruit? Or did you receive the word, believe the word, go through life thinking you're a Christian, but never bear any fruit at all?

If you're enjoying the riches and pleasures of this life, Jesus would say you're being choked – you're not producing the fruit he wants. John the Baptist and Jesus both said that every tree that fails to produce fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.²⁰

So, if you're spending your time, money, and energy enjoying the riches and pleasures of this life... Jesus said you're not producing good fruit, John said the love of the Father isn't in you, James said you hate God, you're his enemy and you're an adulterer, Paul said you're apostate, and Jesus – the King and Judge you will have to give an answer to – said you will be thrown into the fire.

¹² Luke 12:22,33

¹³ Ref. Luke 3:11

¹⁴ Ref. Luke 19:1-10

¹⁵ Ref. Acts 2:44-46, 4:32-35, 6:1-4

¹⁶ Ref. 1 John 2:15

¹⁷ Ref. James 4:3-10

¹⁸ Ref. 2 Timothy 3:1-5

¹⁹ Luke 8:14

²⁰ Ref. Matthew 3:8-10, 7:15-21; Luke 3:7-11; John 15:6

You cannot follow him and enjoy the pleasures of this world and this life at the same time. Because Jesus gave us a command: “I give you a new command: Love one another. You must love one another as I have loved you.”²¹ “This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you.”²²

We are not commanded merely to love. We are commanded to love with the same kind of love Jesus has for us. Jesus gave up everything for us. He was rich, and he gave it all up.²³ He was in the form of God, and he made himself nothing.²⁴ He is our Lord, but he made himself a slave.²⁵ He is the author of life, but he gave up his life as our ransom.²⁶ He did this for us. His love included more than just helping others – it included letting go of pleasure, letting go of possessions, no longer looking out for his own interests, no longer doing whatever he wanted.

So, are Christians really following him when they say we don’t have to do the same? Are Christians really following him when they spend their lives on their own pleasure and entertainment? Are Christians really following him when they give themselves all the things they want? As Paul said, “Christ died for all so that those who live would no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised from the dead.”²⁷

Jesus made himself nothing and died to make us people who no longer live for ourselves. This isn’t something we get to pick and choose which aspects of our lives are going to be for the Lord, and which aspects we can still enjoy for ourselves. You’re either in or you’re out. You’re either living for the tiny house, or you’re not. You’re either living for the garden, or you’re not. You’re either living for the Kingdom, or you’re not.

Jesus wants us to do what he did – he wants us to do everything we can to help others. He wants us to be people who stop looking out for our own interests. That means more than just helping others when we happen to notice. That means we stop living in comfort and ease, we stop living in luxury, and we stop enjoying all the pleasures of this life so that we can maximize how much good we’re able to do!

If we stop spending money on ourselves, we have so much more we can give to others! If we sell the possessions we have, we have the means to immediately help others! Furthermore, if we stop spending money on ourselves, then we can spend less time trying to make money, and more time meeting the needs of others! Our lives are supposed to be entirely about others – about meeting needs and helping people live – not about having fun and a good time!

The first Church was not *only* a group of people who helped one another with their needs. It was a group of people who simplified their lives so they could help as much as possible. They let go of the things of this world, and they prioritized one another. This step is essential for this kind of community to work. If everyone is sharing everything, but one person is refusing to simplify, that person will require more resources than the others. Suddenly, those who have less will be funding the lifestyle of the person who has more. It doesn’t work! If someone is refusing to let go of this world, they’re proving that they don’t love their brothers and sisters – they’re refusing to do what they can to meet the needs of others, and they’re also forcing their brothers and sisters to fund their extravagance!

“Extravagance” doesn’t mean *living in a mansion and driving a sports car*. “Extravagance” could be as simple as *taking a vacation, going out to eat, or going to the movies*. The point is – if one person is living at a higher standard than others, that one person will consume more resources, and all will not be equal.

²¹ John 13:34

²² John 15:12

²³ Ref. 2 Corinthians 8:9

²⁴ Ref. Philippians 2:4-8

²⁵ Ref. Philippians 2:7; Luke 22:25-27; John 13:14-17

²⁶ Ref. Acts 3:15; Matthew 20:26-28; Mark 10:42-45

²⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:15

To have equality and also meet as many needs as possible, everyone must simplify. You cannot meet the needs of everyone while everyone is also pursuing the American dream. Or in other words, you cannot love God and love the world. You cannot love God and want things for your own pleasure. Loving God means obeying him²⁸ – you cannot love him and continue pursuing the American dream.

Until American Christians repent, they will never experience the life we see in Acts. They will never taste true Christianity. American (and Western) Christians must let go of their current standard of living. They must begin to recognize they don't need the things they think they need. They will never be able to meet the needs of all the brothers and sisters until they let go of their current lifestyle. And they will never know God until they begin to love the brothers and sisters with God's radical love.²⁹

As God said to King Jehoiakim, “Your father was satisfied to have food and drink. He did what was right and fair, so everything went well for him. He helped those who were poor and needy, so everything went well for him. That is what it means to know God,” says the LORD.”³⁰ And as John said, “Anyone who says, ‘I know God,’ but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person... Whoever says that he abides in God must live as Jesus lived.”³¹

James gave us another warning many Christians don't understand:

“People who think they are religious but say things they should not say are just fooling themselves. Their ‘religion’ is worth nothing. Religion that God the Father accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans and widows who need help, and keeping yourself free from the world's evil influence.”³²

Lots of Christians think they're living for God. They think they're religious. They think they're right with God and living in a way that pleases him. But their religion is worth nothing. There is only one kind of life that God accepts. The only kind of religion that is acceptable to God is a lifestyle defined by loving others – caring for orphans who need help, caring for widows who need help, and staying free from the world's evil influence.

The world is God's enemy. The world lives in a way that God hates. Jesus often said things like, “You don't care about the things of God, but only about things people think are important.”³³ He also said, “What is important to people is an abomination in God's sight.”³⁴

Keeping ourselves free from the world's evil influence is about more than just *not getting drunk* or *not sleeping around* or *not watching bad scenes in movies*. The world's evil influence is what tells us we need to live the American dream. The world's evil influence is what tries to get us to waste away our money on possessions and entertainment for ourselves rather than using our resources to help others survive. The world's evil influence tries to get us to change our priorities in life – to get us to live for this life and this world rather than the Kingdom of God. The world's evil influence is, quite simply, everything about the world we live in.

We're supposed to be completely different than the world. That means we should be people who reject everything the world offers – the stuff, the entertainment, the lifestyle, and the worldviews. This goes back to what Paul said – do not be conformed to the world.³⁵

We cannot let the world around us shape us. We cannot allow it to press us into a mold. We

²⁸ Ref. 1 John 5:3

²⁹ Ref. 1 John 2:4, 2:9-11, 2:24-25, 3:4-11, 3:14, 3:16-18, 3:22-24, 4:7-12, 4:16, 4:19-21, 5:1-3

³⁰ Jeremiah 22:15-16

³¹ 1 John 2:4,6

³² James 1:26-27

³³ Mark 8:33

³⁴ Luke 16:15

³⁵ Ref. Romans 12:1-2

must stay different. We must keep ourselves free from the world's evil influence.

God hates what the world does. He hates how people live. He hates how the world is full of people who pile up possessions for themselves while others nearby are naked, starving, and homeless. He hates consumerism. He hates the world's entertainment. He hates the world's luxuries and pleasures. He hates how much the world tells people to focus on themselves, spend on themselves, enjoy themselves, and provide for themselves. He hates how the world tells people that if they have more than they need to survive, that means they can enjoy a higher standard of living. He hates how people put their own standard of living as a higher priority than the survival of others.

He told us a day is coming when he will crush this world. The Kingdom of God will crush the kingdoms of this world, and God will establish true justice on the earth.

But Christians don't seem to understand what justice is.

Do you understand that it's unjust in God's eyes for you to have more than you need to survive while someone near you is starving?³⁶ Do you understand that it's unjust in God's eyes for you to sit back in pleasure while someone near you is dying, and you could help?³⁷ Do you understand that it's unjust in God's eyes for you to spend time, money, and energy enjoying nice things while others nearby don't have anything at all?³⁸

The world tells us these things are acceptable. But Moses told Israel that God hates these things.³⁹ The prophets told Israel God was going to judge them because they did these things.⁴⁰ Jesus told the Pharisees they were hypocrites because they lived this way.⁴¹ And the apostles warned us that the Church would become an apostate adulterous people because they would accept this kind of lifestyle.⁴²

Look at the Church today to see if the apostles were true prophets: The Church has not kept itself free from the world's evil influence. Christians have adopted the world's definition of justice – they have become corrupted by the world's evil influence. They've accepted an American worldview in place of a Kingdom of God worldview. They're convinced that God cares about the things that Americans value. They're convinced that if God created the laws of a nation, he would create a capitalist society where everyone looks out for their own needs and everyone has the opportunity to “pick themselves up by their own bootstraps” and make a better life for themselves. Therefore, they're convinced that it's okay for them to build a nice life for themselves and to hold on to their possessions.

Often when Christians hear about “sharing everything in common” and “everyone living in equality,” they respond by saying, “Well, that sounds like communism.” There's a problem with this response: it shows that they're getting their values and their beliefs primarily from America rather than the Bible. The Bible doesn't use the words *capitalism* or *communism*. But the Bible does tell us what kind of laws God would write if he was creating the laws of a nation... because he *did* create the laws of a nation!

In Exodus, God said not to mistreat foreigners, widows or orphans. He said not to charge interest on loans, and to return collateral when someone takes out a loan – even before they pay it

³⁶ Ref. Psalm 146:7; Proverbs 22:9, 28:27, 29:7; Isaiah 32:6, 58:7-11; 2 Corinthians 8:8-15

³⁷ Ref. Leviticus 25:35-38; Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Psalm 41:1, 72:12-14, 138:6; Proverbs 3:27-28, 21:13, 24:11-12; Ezekiel 16:49; Luke 10:25-37, 16:19-31; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; James 4:17; 1 John 3:16-18

³⁸ Ref. Jeremiah 22:16; Ezekiel 16:49, 18:7-9; Zechariah 7:8-10; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 8:8-15; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; James 5:1-5; 1 John 3:16-18

³⁹ Ref. Exodus 22:21-27; Leviticus 19:9-10, 19:13, 23:22, 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 10:18-19, 14:28-29, 15:1, 15:7-11, 15:13-15, 24:12-15, 24:17, 24:19-22, 26:12-13, 27:19

⁴⁰ Ref. Isaiah 1:17, 1:23, 3:15, 5:7-8, 10:1-2, 32:6, 58:1-10; Jeremiah 5:27-29, 7:5-7, 22:3-4; Ezekiel 16:49, 22:7, 22:12, 22:29; Amos 2:6-8, 4:1, 5:10-15, 6:1, 8:4-6; Micah 2:1-2, 6:11-12; Zechariah 7:8-10; Malachi 3:5

⁴¹ Ref. Matthew 23:3-4, 23:14, 23:23, 23:25-28; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 11:39-46, 16:14-15, 20:45-47

⁴² Ref. Acts 20:29-35; 2 Thessalonians 2:3, 2:9-12; 1 Timothy 6:3-10; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-3, 2:10-22; 1 John 3:10; Jude 4, 11-13, 17-19

back.⁴³ In Leviticus, he said to purposefully leave some of the harvest behind and allow the poor and the foreigners to come into your fields and eat some of your harvest.⁴⁴ He also said that every fifty years, all debts should be completely wiped out and all property that was sold should be returned to the previous owner.⁴⁵ Later in the chapter, he said that if someone is poor, you should not try to make a profit from that person, but you should help that person and make sure all their needs are met.⁴⁶ In Deuteronomy, God said that every person in the nation should bring a tenth of everything they make or grow, and it should be given to the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows – so those people are not in need.⁴⁷ Also in Deuteronomy, God said to give freely to the poor without worrying about whether or not they would repay.⁴⁸

These are just a few examples. These are the kinds of laws God would write for a nation. The Law of Moses was not just religious law. It was national law. This is the kind of nation God wants. This is the kind of kingdom God wants.

Does it sound like capitalism?

- Don't charge interest.
- Let the poor come onto *your* land and eat *your* food that *you* grew in *your* fields.
- Release people from debt even if they don't pay it.
- Don't even try to profit off poor people, but make sure all their needs are met.
- Bring a portion of everything you make and share it with the poor so there are no needy people in the country. (This is, literally, the definition of *communism*.)
- Give to the poor without worrying whether or not they can pay you back.

What kind of society does that sound like to you?

Furthermore, when Jesus came, establishing the Kingdom of God, he taught the exact same things... Give freely to everyone who asks.⁴⁹ Sell your possessions and give to the poor.⁵⁰ Lend to your enemies, and lend without charging interest.⁵¹ Welcome strangers into your home.⁵² Feed those who are hungry.⁵³ Clothe those who are naked.⁵⁴ And so many other things like these.

Jesus didn't encourage capitalism. He didn't encourage his followers to build businesses, build wealth, and create a better life for themselves. He didn't teach people to fight for their own rights and their own freedoms. He didn't encourage Christians to become the capitalist, business-loving, wealth-promoting, money-lovers they've become today. He said, "Woe to you who are rich, because you have had your easy life. Woe to you who are well-fed now, because you will be hungry."⁵⁵

Jesus is not a capitalist. God is not a capitalist. God demands that his people prioritize the needs of others. He demands that his people pick the needy out of the ashes – not that they provide

⁴³ Ref. Exodus 22:21-27

⁴⁴ Ref. Leviticus 19:9-10 and 23:22

⁴⁵ Ref. Leviticus 25:8-17

⁴⁶ Ref. Leviticus 25:35-43

⁴⁷ Ref. Deuteronomy 14:28-29

⁴⁸ Ref. Deuteronomy 15:7-11

⁴⁹ Ref. Matthew 5:42; Luke 6:30

⁵⁰ Ref. Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 12:33, 18:22

⁵¹ Ref. Matthew 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36

⁵² Ref. Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2

⁵³ Ref. Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 12:42-44, 14:12-14

⁵⁴ Ref. Matthew 5:40, 25:31-46; Luke 3:11, 6:29

⁵⁵ Luke 6:24-25

a way for the needy to pick themselves up by their own bootstraps. God demands that his people love one another, prioritize one another, meet the needs of one another, sell their possessions to help one another, live simply, and demonstrate his love.

The early Church created an alternative society founded on everything Jesus taught – it was a society where everyone shared everything in common and there were no needy people whatsoever. No one had more than they needed, and no one had less.⁵⁶ They worked hard for the good of others – not for themselves. They lowered their own standard of living so everyone would be equal. They eliminated poverty by letting go of their riches. Because that is what God values.

The Bible tells us exactly what kind of society God values. It tells us exactly what kind of society God would set up if he were establishing a nation. Yet, despite this, so many Christians assume that God would want things to be done in His Kingdom exactly like they are in America. They defend a society and a system that is founded on greed, the love of money, and the accumulation of possessions, and they think they're defending something God loves.

But they're deceived.

They think “God” and “Country” go hand-in-hand... but the Kingdom of God is its own kingdom. The Kingdom of God is going to crush all other kingdoms and all other nations.⁵⁷ That includes America.

Instead of building their values and lifestyle around what God said, Christians build their values and lifestyle around what the world says. That is the world's evil influence James warned us about. It's one way Christians have allowed themselves to be conformed to this world. They've let the world around them mold their beliefs and shape their worldview rather than receiving their beliefs and worldview from God and God alone.

Don't get me wrong; I get that history is full of some awful crimes against humanity in many communist countries. History is also full of some awful crimes against humanity due to capitalism (but most Christians don't even know that). However – historically speaking, what makes communism fail? When things have gone bad, what happened that made it evil? What caused the atrocities that everyone remembers whenever someone mentions communism? It's always the leadership – the king at the top – the guy getting rich off everyone else, thinking more about himself than all the people of his kingdom. He gets richer and his people get poorer.

But that's exactly the point. The Bible doesn't tell you to change America. The Bible tells you to change yourself. The Bible tells you to die and become a citizen of a different kingdom – the Kingdom of God. The Bible says the Church needs to be different. The Church is an alternative society within a society. The Kingdom of God is its own kingdom. It has its own laws. And it has its own King. When Christians say they don't want to live the way the Bible says to live because “it sounds like communism,” the only reason they say that is because communism consistently fails due to evil kings.

In other words, they're accusing the King of being evil.

If everyone shares everything because they died to this world, they rose from the dead, the King lives in their hearts, the Law is written on their hearts, and they're doing it willingly – then it works. We see that clearly in the Book of Acts. We see that with the Macedonians. We see that as Paul collected a gift from all the Gentile Churches and brought it back to Jerusalem. It worked! But it only works if everyone genuinely cares more about others than they do themselves. I get that maybe it doesn't work in a fallen world within a human kingdom; but it does work in the Kingdom of God. But it requires Christians to stop loving themselves. It requires Christians to stop loving money. It requires Christians to stop loving pleasure.

⁵⁶ Ref. Acts 2:44-46, 4:32-35; 2 Corinthians 8:8-15; 1 John 3:16-18

⁵⁷ Ref. Daniel 2:44; Ephesians 1:21-23; Philippians 2:9-11

It requires Christians to stop hating God. It requires Christians to stop being influenced by the world. It requires Christians to be different than everyone else. It requires holiness.

The world's evil influence isn't just bad movies, sex scenes, language, violence, and drugs. The world's evil influence is how it tells you that it's okay to look out for yourself. The world's evil influence is what convinces Christians that it's okay to live the American dream.

Jesus didn't come to this earth, make himself nothing, become a servant, suffer, and die to make us people who sit around enjoying the things of this world. This world is God's enemy. The Kingdom of God is going to crush all the nations of the world because of the evil ways they live.

Jesus came and died to make us people who are different. He came to make us people who no longer live for ourselves.⁵⁸ He came to make us people who are holy. Being holy means our priorities get in line with what God values. Being holy means our time is spent doing what God values. Being holy means our money is spent doing what God values.

Being holy means we no longer live the American Dream. Being holy means we no longer live like Americans. Being holy means we're different. Being different means we stop trying to enjoy all the pleasures of life. We stop accepting all the entertainment of the world. We stop accepting all the things the world tells us we need. It means we stop living like Americans and we start living like Christians – we live simply so we can help others.

We live in a society that tries to tell us that we need the things of this life and the things of this world. The Bible told us the Church would eventually accept those lies and become an adulterous, apostate people. When we look at the Church today, we can see that it's true. It's time for Christians to become different. It's time for Christians to become holy – to separate from the world and stop accepting its lies, to stop accepting all the things the world says we need to have, and all the things the world says we need to be doing with our lives. It's time for Christians to simplify.

If you're a Christian, you belong to the Kingdom of God. If you're a Christian, you live the way Jesus said to live; you don't accept the culture of the world around you, and you don't accept its stuff, its pleasures, and its entertainment. Being a Christian means we're different. Being a Christian means we don't conform to the world. We don't let the world influence us.

So, be different.

If you spend your time, money or energy on entertainment, possessions, vacations, music, restaurants, pleasure, or anything similar, you are proving through your actions that you do not love God. Your actions speak louder than your words. Your actions show what you truly want and what you're truly living for. Do your actions line up with what God wants? Do your actions line up with what Jesus taught? Do your actions fit into the Kingdom of God?

Stop loving the world. Stop accepting the things of this world. If you do, the love of the Father is not in you. Christ died for all so that those who live will no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them.⁵⁹ So, go live for him and not yourself. Go build your life around living for him, and spend your time living for him. Spend your money living for him. Spend your energy living for him. Simplify your life so you have more to give. Stop spending yourself on this world. Stop giving yourself over to God's enemy. Stop hating God according to the biblical definition of what it means to hate God.

Go be different.

⁵⁸ Ref. 2 Corinthians 5:15

⁵⁹ Ref. 2 Corinthians 5:15