

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 9 – Lies Christians Believe About Loving One Another

In the early Church, in the book of Acts, we see a remarkable description of the first Christians. The book of Acts describes them as living a kind of lifestyle that is radically different than anything happening in the Church today.

They shared all their possessions in common with one another. They lived in a tight-knit community where they acted as if they really were a true family – they lived together, they ate together, they shared their possessions with one another, they shared their money with one another. They sold the things they owned and gave the money to anyone in need among them. They ate together every day. They shared their food with those who needed food among them. No one who became a Christian was ever in need again because every single Christian actively made sure all the needs of everyone else around them were completely and fully met. They would sell their land, their fields, and their houses, and give the money from the sale to anyone who needed it.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and praying together. The apostles were doing many miracles and signs, and everyone felt great fear for God. All the believers were together and held all things in common. They would sell their land and the things they owned and then divide the money and give it to anyone who needed it. The believers met together in the Temple every day. They ate together in their homes, sharing their food with joyful and simple hearts.”¹

“The group of believers were united in their hearts and spirit. No one said any of their possessions was their own. In fact, everything was held in common. With great power the apostles gave testimony that the Lord Jesus was truly raised from the dead. And great grace was on all of them. For there were no needy people among them. Because from time to time those who owned fields or houses sold them, brought the money from the sale, and gave it to the apostles. Then the money was distributed to anyone who needed it.”²

They lived a radical lifestyle. Not only did they share everything, but they were so devoted to one another – making sure that no brother or sister had any needs – that they sold their own possessions and gave to them. They chose to help one another rather than build a nice, comfortable life for themselves. They chose to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters rather than accumulating possessions, building wealth, or increasing their own standard of living.

They cared more about the needs of the other believers around them than they did about themselves. They cared more about making sure everyone else had what was needed to survive than they did about having comfort, pleasure, entertainment, luxury, wealth, or possessions. They were all willing to live simple, humble lives to make sure that everyone had what they needed.

Those who were rich among them gave to those who were poor – not just to meet their needs, but to the point where they all lived in total equality with one another. No one had more than they needed, and no one had less than they needed. No one lived in luxury. No one held on to more than the bare necessities for themselves. No one tried to make a better life for themselves.

They didn’t care about owning things or having the best stuff. In fact, they didn’t consider

¹ Acts 2:42-46, (EXB; italics ESV)

² Acts 4:32-35

anything as belonging to themselves in the first place.

Their lives – their daily lives – were defined by radically looking out for one another more than they looked out for themselves. They refused to live a life where they had more and one of their brothers or sisters had less.

It was a sort of “holy communism,” not forced on them by the laws of a nation – but chosen willingly by everyone involved. Everyone chose to live this way. Everyone wanted to live this way.

So, the question Christians need to start asking is: Why?

Why did they sell their own possessions? Why did they share everything in common? Why did they refuse to build a nice life for themselves?

Why did the early Church choose to live this way?

What caused them to start doing this?

Why was it that when they chose to become Christians, they all started living this extraordinary, radical lifestyle, but today Christians don't feel the need to do this?

Where did they get the idea that they should live like this?

Was this lifestyle something essential to true Christianity, or was it just something the early Church chose to do... for no apparent reason?

When Christians today look at this description of the early Church, most Christians think this is something that was just unique to them. They think it was something they did, but not something every Christian is expected to do.

I've heard many Christians say, “that's just the way they did things.” They've said, “it's not something God expects everyone to do. It's not something the Bible teaches us to do.” I've also heard Christians say, “only the early Church in Jerusalem in Acts did that. None of the other early Churches lived that way.”

So, the question is – is this true? Was this radical lifestyle something the early Church just started doing for some unknown reason? Is this radical lifestyle something we can dismiss as unimportant for us to follow in their example?

Christians today are far too comfortable dismissing the examples set by the people in the Bible. Christians today arrogantly assume they know more than the people in Scripture. Sure – they'd never say it that way. They don't *think* they know more than those people. But they look at those people, they see their examples, they see that those people lived a completely different lifestyle marked by a radical kind of love for others, and they just dismiss it without giving it any real thought. They assume those people just randomly decided to start living in a radical way all by themselves. They assume there's no need for us to follow their example.

They're so dogmatic about their human teaching that tells them becoming a Christian is all about believing in the right information that they don't even ask the question, “why did they start doing that, and why don't we do that today?”

They never start to ask themselves, “why?” because they've been convinced by men that they're saved by belief and not obedience. Therefore, they have no motivation whatsoever to start living in a radical way that would cost them all their comfort, their luxury, their possessions, their time, and everything else they're currently enjoying in life.

They don't ask, “why?” and they don't investigate it because it's not something they want to do, and they've been told they don't need to. So, they just dismiss the fact that every early Christian seemed to think this kind of radical lifestyle was something they were supposed to be doing.

This lifestyle wasn't something they just randomly started doing. They did it because it was what the apostles taught them to do.

When we look at the Church in Acts, we need to remember – this is the only time in all of history where the Church was led by all of the apostles, in one place, at the same time. These men

were taught by Jesus himself. They followed him for years, listening to him, learning from him, and being trained by him. Jesus had instructed them, “go and make disciples of all the nations... Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you...”³

So that’s what the apostles did. They taught others what Jesus had taught them. They taught them to obey Jesus. The apostles knew what the true message of Jesus was. They walked with Jesus himself. They were the most reliable people you could possibly learn the truth from.

When Acts said that the believers in the early Church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching,” we tend to think of it today as if the believers devoted themselves to sit around and listen to the teaching of the apostles. We think of it as, “they devoted themselves to make sure they always *heard* the apostles’ teaching.”

We think of it this way because that’s what we do today. Christians today devote themselves to listening to sermons, reading books, and going to Church on Sunday to hear their pastor preach.

But that’s not what it said, and that’s not what it meant.

It said, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...”

In the original Greek, the word, *devoted* is the word, προσκαρτερέω (*proskarteréo*) It meant, *to be strong or steadfast pertaining to...* It meant you were doing something, and you persevered in it and adhered closely to it.

So, in other words, when Acts said the early believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, it was saying they were *doing* what the apostles were teaching. They were obeying. They steadfastly adhered to the apostles’ teaching. They persevered in it even when it was hard. They closely followed what the apostles taught.

They were not devoted to listening. The early Christians were devoted to *doing* what the apostles taught them to *do*.

So, look at the full picture: We have this description of the early Church – the only time in history when all the men trained directly by Jesus were all in the same place, teaching people what Jesus had taught them. The believers are described as devoting themselves to steadfastly obey what the apostles taught. And then it immediately described what that looked like – they shared all their possessions in common, they sold their belongings and gave to those in need, they shared food together, shared their homes together, there were no needy people among them, and everyone lived simple, humble lives, looking out for the needs of their fellow believers above their own needs and above their own comfort.

Why did they do this?

Because they steadfastly obeyed what the apostles taught – and the apostles taught what Jesus had taught them. Luke said the believers devoted themselves to do what the apostles were teaching, and then he immediately said what they were doing. Clearly, what they were doing had something to do with what the apostles taught them to do.

If it’s what the apostles taught them to do, then it’s something we should be doing, too, if we want to be followers of Jesus.

Yet most Christians today read this description and think, “Meh! Irrelevant! We’re saved by believing. We don’t have to do that!”

They don’t question it any further. They don’t wonder where the early Christians got this idea into their heads that they should live this way. They don’t try to figure it out. And they don’t consider it extremely important to make sure they’re not missing something.

This is arrogance – arrogantly assuming we’ve got it all figured out and we can confidently continue living a life that none of the early Christians chose to live.

This needs to end.

³ Matthew 28:19-20

Ep. 9 – Lies Christians Believe About Loving One Another

As we've been discussing throughout this series, the Bible *does* teach us that we need to obey. It's not about merely believing the right information.

John wrote the following warnings:

"If we say we have fellowship with God, but we continue living in darkness, we are liars and do not follow the truth."⁴

"Anyone who says, 'I know God,' but does not obey his commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person."⁵

"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... but the person who does what God wants lives forever."⁶

"...all who practice righteousness are God's children."⁷

"Those who do not practice righteousness are not God's children..."⁸

"The people who obey God's commands abide in God, and God abides in them."⁹

"Loving God means obeying his commands."¹⁰

If someone does not obey God's commands, then they're not really a Christian – even if they believe in Jesus, say they know God, and call Jesus, "Lord!"¹¹

As we saw in the last video, obeying God's commands is not about going to church, reading the Bible, praying, singing worship songs, going on missions trips, trying not to sin, and all the other things we tend to associate with Christianity today. God's commands are all about loving one another – they're all outward focused. They're all about how we treat others.

Jesus said, "I give you a new command: Love one another. You must love one another as I have loved you."¹²

He said again, "This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you."¹³

When John said that anyone who doesn't obey God's commands isn't actually a Christian, this is what he was talking about. It's the command to love one another: Anyone who does not love the brothers and sisters is not a true Christian.

John said this directly: "Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light and there is no cause of stumbling in him. But 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."¹⁴

"...those who do not love their brothers and sisters are not God's children."¹⁵

"This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other."¹⁶

"We know we have left death and come into life because we love the brothers and sisters. Whoever does not love is still dead."¹⁷

"This is what God commands: that we believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and that

⁴ 1 John 1:6

⁵ 1 John 2:4

⁶ 1 John 2:15,17

⁷ 1 John 2:29

⁸ 1 John 3:10

⁹ 1 John 3:24

¹⁰ 1 John 5:3

¹¹ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

¹² John 13:34

¹³ John 15:12

¹⁴ 1 John 2:10-11

¹⁵ 1 John 3:10

¹⁶ 1 John 3:11

¹⁷ 1 John 3:14

we love each other, just as he commanded.”¹⁸

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”¹⁹

“If people say, ‘I love God,’ but hate their brothers and sisters, they are liars. Those who do not love their brothers and sisters whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have never seen. And God gave us this command: Those who love God must also love their brothers and sisters.”²⁰

So, if we call ourselves Christians, we believe in Jesus, we call Jesus “Lord,” we say we know God, and we say that we love God, but we don’t love the brothers and sisters, then according to John, we’re liars, the truth isn’t in us, we’re not God’s children, we live in darkness, we’re blinded by the darkness, and we don’t know God.

In short, if we don’t live in love, then we’re not actually Christians – even if we think we are.

That means it’s not just about believing the right information. We are expected to obey. We’re expected to love. Being a Christian means we obey the commands of God, and his commands are to love one another.

But there’s a problem.

Almost every Christian knows we’re supposed to love. Everyone knows Jesus commanded us to love one another. Everyone knows God wants us to live lives marked by love.

However, *love* is one of those words most Christians read in the Bible and just assume they know what it means. Everyone assumes they know what it means to love someone.

Love is a word we use all the time. We all know what it means. We all understand it.

Right?

But John also said something that confused me for many years:

“Everyone who loves has become God’s child and knows God.”²¹

“...if we love each other, God abides in us...”²²

“Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”²³

According to John, if you love others, then you have become God’s child, you know God, you abide in God, and God abides in you.

Here’s why this confused me:

When I grew up in church, I grew up in an almost completely Christian culture. Everyone I knew said they were Christians. All my friends said they were Christians. I went to a Christian school, I went to Church on Sunday, I was surrounded by Christians. I read these verses and thought, “all unbelievers must be really mean, angry, selfish people who don’t care about anyone except themselves.”

Why?

Because the Bible says everyone who loves has become God’s child and knows God. Therefore, unbelievers must not love. I didn’t know any unbelievers, because I lived in a culture of Christians and only ever knew Christians growing up, so I just assumed they must not love anyone.

As I got older, I started to get to know some unbelievers. These people outright said they didn’t believe in God. They outright denied Jesus. Some of them were atheists, and others believed in other religions. They were clearly not Christians in any way, shape, or form.

But something was wrong. Something confused me. Something made me hesitate and

¹⁸ 1 John 3:23

¹⁹ 1 John 4:8

²⁰ 1 John 4:20-21

²¹ 1 John 4:7

²² 1 John 4:12

²³ 1 John 4:16

question the Bible... They were really nice! They were really kind! They were really loving! In fact, some of them were more loving than most of the Christians I knew! They were generous. They had happy families. They loved their kids. They loved their friends. They loved me.

How can the Bible say that everyone who loves is God's child and knows God when there are so many people in the world who outright deny Jesus, deny God, and aren't Christians, yet who clearly and deeply love others?

Furthermore, Jesus told us, "All people will know that you are my followers if you love one another."²⁴

How can all people know that we're his followers based on our love if unbelievers are loving too? How can we be identified by our love if sometimes unbelievers are more loving than we are? How is it that love will ever be enough to distinguish who belongs to God and who does not if unbelievers are also fully capable of loving?

How is that possible?

Is the Bible wrong?

Does this mean Christianity is all a lie?

No. The problem is not the Bible. The problem is that Christians today have accepted the world's definition of what it means to love others. They think it means being nice. They think it means doing kind things. They think it means loving your kids and your family. They think it means having feelings or affection. They think it means being friendly. They think it means getting along with people.

They use the same definition as the world, and therefore they look no different than the world.

If you use the world's definition of *love*, then you will never be able to be identified by your love, because you're only loving others in the same way the world loves others.

The world is full of people who are nice to others, who have deep affection for others, who are kind to others, who give gifts to others, who try to help others, and who truly love others from the depths of their hearts.

But that's not what biblical love is. Sure – all those things are part of what it means to love others, but God's definition of *love* is so much bigger than the world's definition of *love*. God's definition of *love* is what we see in the book of Acts. It's what Jesus did for us.

Remember – Jesus' command was not just "love one another." His command was, "Love one another. You must love one another as I have loved you."²⁵

He said again, "This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you."²⁶

We were not just commanded to love. We were commanded to love one another *as Jesus loved us*. We are supposed to love with the same radical love that Jesus showed for us where he laid down his life for us, gave up everything, made himself nothing, disregarded everything that was good for himself, and chose to do what was best for us even though it cost him everything.

This is the kind of love we see in the early Church in the book of Acts. Biblical love is when you sell your possessions and give to your brothers and sisters in need so that there are no people in need whatsoever within the body of Christ. Biblical love is when you prioritize the needs of others above yourself, and you willingly choose to stop accumulating wealth and possessions because you care more about meeting the needs of others rather than having a comfortable life for yourself. Biblical love is when you always help when you see a need. Biblical love is when you open your home for strangers to come live with you. Biblical love is when, instead of increasing your own standard of living, you spend all your excess on meeting the needs of others. Biblical love is when you actually lower your own standard of living down to the bare minimum so that you have more you're able to

²⁴ John 13:35

²⁵ John 13:34

²⁶ John 15:12

give.

This is what Jesus did for us, and this is what the apostles taught.

In 1 John, the apostle John told us that the only ones who are truly Christians are those who obey God's commands. He told us that God's commands are to love one another, and he told us that everyone who loves has become God's child. But he didn't just leave it at that.

He defined true love. He told us what real love is:

"This is how we know what real love is: Jesus laid down his life for us. So we should lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Suppose someone has the world's possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person. My children, we should love people not only with words and talk, but by showing true love through our actions."²⁷

Real love is not just *being nice*. Real love is when you lay down your life for others.

Jesus laid down his life for us. If we're supposed to love one another with that same kind of love, then that means real love is when we lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Having the world's possessions simply means you own some things: You have some stuff, whatever it may be, and however much it may be. John said that if you have the world's possessions and you see a brother or sister in need, but you don't help, then God's love is not in you.

If God's love is not in you, then you're not a Christian.

If God's love is not in you, then you're not saved.

Real love isn't only expressed through words. It isn't only expressed through talk. Real love is expressed through action. If you really love a brother or sister, you will not allow them to remain in need. You will drop everything for them. You will give up your own possessions for them. You will share everything with them. You won't hold back. Jesus didn't hold back for you, so you won't hold back for them.

John also said, "This is how God showed his love to us: He sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could have life through him. This is what real love is: It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us. He sent his Son as the propitiation for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us in this way we also should love each other."²⁸

John was saying that real love isn't the kind of love we humans naturally express. Real love is what God did. God sent his one and only Son to give us life.

Jesus died. Jesus laid down his own life. It cost him everything. He held nothing back.

That's what real love is.

John said if God loved us with that kind of love, then that's the kind of love we should have for one another.

Jesus taught his disciples to love one another with the same kind of love he showed for us. It's a radical love. It's an extraordinary love. It costs everything. It's more than just helping when you see a need, it's lowering yourself and giving up your own comforts and pleasure and all the things you enjoy so you can meet as many needs as possible.

This is what Jesus taught his disciples, and he told them to teach others what he had taught them. That's why, in Acts 2 and 4, it says that the people were devoted to doing what the apostles taught, and then immediately describes them as selling their possessions and giving to those who had need. It describes them as sharing everything in common with each other. It describes them as welcoming each other into their homes and sharing food.

They created this "holy communism" because of real, true, biblical, radical love. They chose a life of sharing everything in common out of biblical love. They chose to sell their own stuff and decrease their own standard of living out of true love. They recognized what Jesus had done for them,

²⁷ 1 John 3:16-18

²⁸ 1 John 4:9-11

and they chose to love one another with the same kind of love.

They were more concerned about the needs of one another than they were about themselves. They recognized that whether or not someone else has food to survive, water to drink, clothes to wear, and a roof over their heads is far more important than if they themselves had the comfortable things this life offers.

That's what real love is. That's what the apostles were teaching from the beginning.

John said, "This is the teaching you have heard from the beginning: We must love each other."²⁹

From the very beginning, this is the message that was taught. The apostles taught people to love one another, and the people devoted themselves to their teaching.

For us to just ignore their example and pretend like what they were doing was just a random thing they did that we don't need to do today is for us to ignore what the apostles taught from the very beginning. And John said that if we don't live that kind of life, then God's love is not in us. If we don't live the life the apostles taught, we aren't true Christians – even if we say we're in the light, claim we know God, call ourselves his children, call Jesus "Lord," and say that we love God.

God's love is not the world's love. If you only love others with the world's love, then God's love does not live in you.

God's love is extraordinary. It is radical. It's absurd. We are supposed to love one another with his love. Paul said, "When you do things, do not let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead, be humble and give more regard to others than to yourselves. Do not look out for your own interests, but look out for others' interests. In your lives you must have the same attitude as Christ Jesus. Christ himself was like God in everything. But he did not think that being equal with God was something to be used for his own benefit. But he gave up his place with God and made himself nothing. He became like a slave and was born as a man. And when he was living as a man, he humbled himself and was fully obedient to God, even to the point of death – death on a cross."³⁰

Paul was saying we should love one another with the same mindset Jesus had. Jesus wasn't guided by selfishness – or in other words, he didn't care about what was best for himself, what he wanted, or what he preferred. Jesus chose to make himself humble – he made himself lower than others, he prioritized them, he made himself a servant to others. He didn't look out for his own interests, or what was good for himself – he looked out for our interests – what was best for us.

Jesus was in the form of God. He was in heaven with God, equal with God, and like God in every way. But he didn't think that was something he should hold onto. He gave it up. He made himself nothing. He became like a slave. He humbled himself and died.

Why?

Because that was what was best for others.

Paul was not just saying, "look at what Jesus did! Isn't he amazing?"

So many Christians read this passage and say, "Amen!" They treat it like it was just talking about how amazing Jesus is. They write it into worship songs, they use it to praise Jesus for what he did, and they have warm feelings when they read it. But they miss Paul's whole point.

Paul's point was not merely to praise Jesus. His point was not to give us lyrics for our worship songs. His point was not merely to show us how incredible Jesus is. His point was that we are supposed to be doing the same thing Jesus did. We should not make our decisions based on what's best for ourselves. We shouldn't go through life looking out for our own interests, making sure our own needs are met, or making sure we have the standard of living we prefer.

We should follow the example of Jesus. We should lower ourselves and prioritize others. We

²⁹ 1 John 3:11

³⁰ Philippians 2:3-8

should give more regard to others than to ourselves – looking out for their needs above our own. We shouldn't see our possessions, our comfort, our money, or anything else we have as something that should be held onto for our own benefit. We should give it up. We should make ourselves nothing. We should make ourselves servants of those around us.

That's what Jesus did for us. That's what he taught his disciples to do. And that's what they taught us.

The early Church devoted themselves to this kind of lifestyle.

The modern Church needs to start taking this seriously.

In this passage, we can see that Paul, as an apostle, taught this lifestyle to the Philippians. So, clearly it wasn't something only the first Church in Jerusalem did (as many Christians claim to excuse themselves from having to live that way). Paul taught others, outside of Jerusalem, to live this way, too.

However, when he wrote to the Corinthians, he was even more direct about it:

“And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace God gave the churches in Macedonia. Although they have been tested by great trials and are very poor, they gave much because of their great joy. I can tell you that they gave as much as they were able and even more than they could afford. No one told them to do it. But they begged and pleaded with us to let them share in this service for God's people...

“I am not commanding you to give. But I want to see if your love is true by comparing you with others that really want to help. You know the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor so that by his becoming poor you might become rich...

“Give from what you have. If you want to give, your gift will be accepted. It will be judged by what you have, not by what you do not have. We do not want you to have trials while other people are at ease, but we want everything to be equal. At this time you have plenty and what you have can help others who are in need. Then later, when they have plenty, they can help you when you are in need, and all will be equal. As it is written in the Scriptures, “The person who gathered more did not have too much, nor did the person who gathered less have too little.”³¹

In this section, Paul was collecting a gift to take to the believers who lived in Jerusalem.³² The Christians in Jerusalem were severely persecuted, and many of them were poor. Paul was collecting a gift from among the Gentile churches to bring it back to help those people and meet their needs.

Paul told the Corinthians about the people in Macedonia. The Macedonians were extremely poor. But even though they were poor, they wanted to help those in need. He said they gave as much as they could give, and even more than they could afford to give. They weren't told to, but they were so filled with love for their brothers and sisters that they begged Paul to accept the gift and take it to those in Jerusalem.

Paul told the Corinthians that he wasn't going to command them to give either. But – he wanted to see if their love was real by comparing the Corinthians to the Macedonians.

Essentially, Paul was saying that the Macedonians proved their love was real: They wanted to give everything they could afford to give and even more. They laid down their lives for the sake of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. They gave up everything. They didn't hold back.

That's real love. God's love was living in their hearts.

Paul wanted to see if the Corinthians would respond the same way. He wanted to see if their love was real, too.

And again, he used Jesus as the example we're supposed to follow. He said, “You know the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor so that by his

³¹ 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

³² Ref. 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Romans 15:25-29

becoming poor you might become rich.”³³

This is the example of love we are supposed to follow. Jesus didn’t just give us his leftovers. He didn’t just do something nice for us. He didn’t just have strong feelings of affection.

He was rich. And we were poor.

He had life. And we were dead.

So he gave up everything.

He made himself poor so that we could have his riches. He died so we could have life. His love was not just about *giving*. It was about letting go of what he had *so* he could give. He let go of his place with God. He let go of his position in heaven. He let go of his riches. He didn’t hold onto it for himself. He didn’t hold back to maintain some standard of living for himself. He emptied himself. He had nothing left over. He held nothing back.

That’s real love. That’s what we’re supposed to do. And that’s what Paul was telling the Corinthians.

But then Paul took it even further...

He told the Corinthians, “Give from what you have. If you want to give, your gift will be accepted. It will be judged by what you have, not by what you do not have. We do not want you to have trials while other people are at ease, but we want everything to be equal. At this time you have plenty and what you have can help others who are in need. Then later, when they have plenty, they can help you when you are in need, and all will be equal. As it is written in the Scriptures, “The person who gathered more did not have too much, nor did the person who gathered less have too little.”³⁴

Paul was telling them their gift would be judged.

He said, “it will be judged by what you have, not by what you do not have.” In other words, he was saying, “if you don’t own a lot, you’re not going to be judged for not giving a lot. But if you have a lot, your gift will be judged in proportion to what you have.”

In other words, generosity isn’t about how much you give. It’s about what you choose to hold onto for yourself. It’s the same thing Jesus said about the widow who only gave two small coins. He compared her to all these rich people who gave huge amounts of money. But Jesus said she gave more than all of them because she gave everything she had to live on. The rich people, on the other hand, gave huge amounts, but they also held onto way more than what they actually needed.³⁵ That’s not real generosity.

Real generosity is judged by what you have.

Paul then told the Corinthians that he did not want them to end up in poverty while others had everything they needed. But he wanted equality. At the time he was writing, the Corinthians had more than they needed, and the believers in Jerusalem didn’t have enough. So, he wanted the Corinthians to give to them so that the believers in Jerusalem would have everything they needed and there would be equality among the entire Church body. Similarly, if at a later point in time the Jerusalem Church had more than they needed and the Corinthians didn’t have enough, they would give to them and there would again be equality.

This is that concept of “holy communism” again. The Church is supposed to have equality. No one should have more than they need, and no one should have less. If you make more than you need for your basic needs to be met, you should be giving to meet the needs of others. Everyone in the Church body should be equal.

Paul backed this up by quoting a verse from Exodus 16.³⁶ “The person who gathered more

³³ 2 Corinthians 8:9

³⁴ 2 Corinthians 8:11-15

³⁵ Ref. Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

³⁶ Ref. Exodus 16:18

did not have too much, nor did the person who gathered less have too little.”

Paul was referring to the story when God provided manna in the wilderness. In that story, God punished those who gathered more food than they actually needed. They tried to get more for themselves than what was needed to meet their needs, so God made the extra food begin to rot and stink. He wanted them to only gather for themselves what was necessary – he didn’t want them accumulating more.

Paul was saying this is how God wants it to be in the Church. No one should hold on to more than they need, and no one should have less than they need. Everything is supposed to be equal within the body of Christ.

This is that “holy communism.” This is exactly what the first Church in Jerusalem did.

Luke described the first Church, saying, “They ate together in their homes, sharing their food with joyful and simple hearts.”³⁷ When he said they had “simple hearts,” he used a word that indicated *simplicity*. He was saying they chose to live a simple, humble life so they could share generously with one another. They didn’t keep more for themselves than they needed. They kept their lives simple. They didn’t accumulate possessions, they didn’t live in big houses, they didn’t enjoy luxuries, pleasures, vacations, or fancy clothes. They lived simply.

Luke also said, “There were no needy people among them. Because from time to time those who owned fields or houses sold them, brought the money from the sale, and gave it to the apostles. Then the money was distributed to anyone who needed it.”³⁸

The first Church lived simply so they could give. They maximized how much good they could do by using their resources for others instead of themselves. Like Jesus, they gave up their riches so those who were poor could be made rich – so they could have what they needed. They made sure there were no needy people among them. They made sure everyone’s needs were met by living simply and sharing everything.

Paul was telling the Corinthians to live the same way – not just among themselves, but across the entire world. If some believers in one city are poor and in need, the believers in another city should help them and meet their needs. There should be no needy people whatsoever in the body of Christ! Those who gather more should not hold onto the excess, and as a result, those who gather less should never have too little.

Clearly this lifestyle was not something only the first Church in Jerusalem did. This was something Paul taught the churches he started everywhere he went.

It’s what the apostles taught from the very beginning.

Here are a few other examples of what the apostles taught:

“When I was with you, I never wanted anyone’s money or fine clothes. You yourselves know I always worked with my own hands to take care of my own needs and the needs of those who were with me. I provided an example to you in everything I did *that you should work as I did and help the weak*. I taught you to remember the words Jesus said: *‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’*”³⁹

“Those leaders who seemed to be important did not change the Good News that I preach... *The only thing they asked us was to remember to help the poor* – something I really wanted to do.”⁴⁰

“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.”⁴¹

“Those who are stealing must stop stealing and start working. They should do something

³⁷ Acts 2:46

³⁸ Acts 4:34-35

³⁹ Acts 20:33-35, emphasis added

⁴⁰ Galatians 2:6,10, emphasis added

⁴¹ Galatians 6:10

useful with their hands. *Then they will have something to share with those who are poor.*⁴²

*“Provide support for widows who are truly widows... But the widow who lives in luxury is really dead while she is alive... To be on the list of widows, a woman must be at least sixty years old. She must have been faithful to her husband. She must be known for her good works – works such as raising her children, welcoming strangers, washing the feet of God’s people, helping those in distress, and giving her life to do all kinds of good deeds.”*⁴³

Paul said if someone lives in luxury, they are really dead while alive. In other words, you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead, if you claim to be a Christian, but you live in luxury. Those who are truly alive will not live in luxury. They will not live for this world. They will not store up treasure on earth. They will not look out for their own interests. Those who are truly alive will live simply – like the Church in Acts – to meet the needs of others and prioritize their interests. Those who are truly alive will help widows, welcome strangers, serve God’s people, help those in distress, and give their entire lives to do all kinds of good deeds.

Anyone who claims to know God without doing these things is really dead while they are alive.

Here are more examples of the apostles’ teaching:

*“Command those who are rich with the things of this world not to be proud. Tell them to hope in God, not in their uncertain riches. God richly gives us everything to enjoy. Tell them to do good, to be rich in doing good deeds, to be generous and ready to share. By doing that, they will be storing up a treasure for themselves as a strong foundation for the future. Then they will be able to take hold of the life that is true life.”*⁴⁴

*“Do not neglect to do good to others, and share with them, because such sacrifices please God.”*⁴⁵

*“Religion that God the Father accepts as pure and without fault is this: caring for orphans and widows in their distress, and keeping yourself free from the world’s evil influence.”*⁴⁶

The Church today needs to return to what we see in Acts 2 and 4. Their lifestyle of radical love was essential to everything else we read about them in the New Testament. Their lifestyle of radical love was what it meant for them to be Christians.

Christians today are too comfortable. They’ve fallen in love with the things of this world. They enjoy their comfort. They enjoy their standard of living. They enjoy their big homes and fancy cars. They enjoy their vacations, holidays, and parties. They enjoy dining out, dressing fashionably, and staying trendy. They enjoy their Netflix subscriptions, their Hulu subscriptions, their Spotify subscriptions, their Amazon Prime subscriptions. They enjoy their entertainment. They enjoy the American dream.

But John said, “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.”⁴⁷

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

Why?

Because you cannot hold on to this world and live in God’s love at the same time.

God’s love requires you to let go of this world. God’s love is when you stop enjoying a comfortable life. It’s when you stop enjoying a higher standard of living. It’s when you stop enjoying all your entertainment and pleasure. It’s when you drop everything and give up everything in order to use those resources to help other people survive. It’s when you lower your own standard of living so

⁴² Ephesians 4:28, emphasis added

⁴³ 1 Timothy 5:3,6,9-10, emphasis added

⁴⁴ 1 Timothy 6:17-19, emphasis added

⁴⁵ Hebrews 13:16, emphasis added

⁴⁶ James 1:27, emphasis added

⁴⁷ 1 John 2:15

you can do more to help others. It's when you find your enjoyment in giving to others rather than holding onto stuff for yourself. It's when you live simply so you can love with the love of Jesus.

From the very beginning, the apostles taught the Church to live in love. And they defined what *love* means.

Yet today, this love is almost absent from the Church. Almost every church in the world today talks about giving – but they usually aren't talking about giving to those in need. They usually talk about giving to the Church as an organization. They talk about giving to pay for buildings, equipment, instruments, sound systems, and other completely non-essential worldly things. They talk about giving to pay salaries to people who are supposed to be serving free-of-charge.⁴⁸

This “giving” is not the kind of giving the Bible teaches.

Christians today don't live in true community. They don't share all their possessions in common. They don't lower their own standard of living to help as many people as they possibly can. They don't prioritize the things God prioritizes. They don't sell their real estate, their cars, their TV's, their Xboxes, their home decor, or their movies and music. They don't cancel their Netflix subscription, their Hulu subscription, their Spotify subscription, or their Amazon Prime subscription.

If they do sell something or cancel a subscription, it might be so that they can save some money for themselves – but it's rarely ever so they have more they can give to those in need.

Christians today think they're serving God when they do “ministry” such as serving at their church, doing some kind of outreach, helping drug addicts, going to prisons, or participating in a food drive – all of which are great! But then they get home and continue living their comfortable, cushy American lives. They do not love with the kind of love Jesus showed for us. They only love with the same kind of love the world shows through humanitarian work, acts of kindness, and worldly generosity. They do good deeds sometimes, but they do not give up everything and live in total equality with all the brothers and sisters. They do not live as an alternative society of people where all needs have been completely and totally wiped out.

Christians today think they're living in love when they buy a new car for themselves and give their old, junker car to someone they know in need. Christians today think they're living in love when they give a small, trivial gift to someone to express their affection for that person, meanwhile they ignore the actual needs all around them. Christians today think they're living in love when they give a one-time gift of money to someone in need, but then they return to their giant homes and comfortable lives. Christians today think they're living in love when they give ten percent of their income, but use the other ninety percent to increase their own standard of living far beyond what they actually need.

This is not God's love.

They cannot be distinguished from the world by their love.

They are not devoted to the teaching of the apostles.

Christians today must repent. They must change the way they're living. The descriptions of the Church in Acts 2 and 4 must become accurate descriptions of the true Church today. There should be no needy people among us. Christians should be selling their possessions and giving to the poor. Christians should be welcoming one another into their homes – not just for a meal, but to live there! Christians should be sharing everything in common with one another so that no one considers their own property to belong to themselves. Christians should be living in total equality with one another – and if there are no needs in the local body of believers, then they should be giving to believers in another location so that there is total equality among believers all around the world.

Christians shouldn't be trying to build successful lives for themselves (according to the world's standard). They shouldn't be trying to accumulate wealth for themselves. They shouldn't be pursuing the American dream.

⁴⁸ Ref. Matthew 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 2:17; 1 Timothy 6:5; 1 Peter 5:2

Ep. 9 – Lies Christians Believe About Loving One Another

Christians should prove that their love is real. The Church in Acts is our example. The Macedonians are our example. We can see if our love is true by comparing ourselves to those who really wanted to help others.

Our standard is not the world's definition of *love*.

Our standard is God's love.

God's love is when you give up everything. God's love is when you stop thinking about how much you *have* to give, and you start thinking about how much you'll *be able* to give if you simply change your own lifestyle.

God's love is the "holy communism" we see in the book of Acts. It's a love where everyone lives a simple life and no one has any need because every single person is choosing to help others rather than help themselves. God's love is when you are genuinely more concerned about the needs of others than you are about yourself – either your own needs or your own "wants".

God's love is what Jesus did for us – he was rich, he was in the form of God himself, he had the literal definition of "everything." He had it. He had it all. And he gave it all up. He made himself poor. He let go of his place in heaven. He made himself nothing. He gave up his riches. He gave up his comfort. He gave up his lifestyle.

Why?

Because we were poor. Because we needed help. Because we had nothing.

So, he gave what he had to us – even though it cost him his very life.

We have God's love living in us when we do the same.

"This is how we can be sure we are in him: Whoever says that he abides in him must walk as he walked."⁴⁹

"Your faith makes you offer your lives as a sacrifice in serving God."⁵⁰

"When we are in Christ Jesus, it is not important if we are circumcised or not. The important thing is faith – *the kind of faith that works through love*."⁵¹

⁴⁹ 1 John 2:5-6

⁵⁰ Philippians 2:17

⁵¹ Galatians 5:6, emphasis added