

## Dead Church Podcast Notes

### Acts Initiative

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### Ep. 1 – The Apostasy of the American Church

In the book of Acts, we read about an unstoppable group of people – the early Church. It was the only time in history when Christians were taught directly by the apostles – people who walked with Jesus in the flesh. They taught original Christianity – it was pure, it was untainted.

The stories we read about the early Church make these people seem almost alien because they were so unlike all the other people around them. They were so different than everyone else.

Most of us today read these stories in our Bibles and try to push away a nagging question – why don't our lives look anything like the book of Acts today? Why does the Church look so different today?

Maybe some of us try to convince ourselves that our lives do look a little like that – that we experience the power of God sometimes, and that our lives are changed, too. But if we're being really honest, we can't actually remember a time when we saw thousands of people get saved all at once,<sup>1</sup> or the last time we were part of a community where people were actually sharing everything they owned and no one had any needs.<sup>2</sup>

What we call Christianity today is just not the same kind of Christianity we read about then. So, what happened? What's wrong? And what do we do about it?

These are the questions we'll be addressing in this series, *Dead Church*.

This series is named *Dead Church* for the same reason Jesus called the Church of Sardis a dead church:

“I know what you do. You have a reputation that you are alive, but really you are dead... I have found that what you are doing is less than what my God wants... Everyone who has ears should hear and obey what the Spirit says to the churches.”<sup>3</sup>

What did Jesus mean by *dead*?

Jesus used the word *dead* to describe people who called themselves Christians but who were on the verge of being rejected by Jesus. After all, Jesus continued in his letter to the church in Sardis by saying, “...you must wake up, or I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ref. Acts 2:41

<sup>2</sup> Ref. Acts 2:42-46, 4:32-35

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 3:1-6

<sup>4</sup> Ref. Revelation 3:3

According to Jesus, if a Christian thinks that they're alive, and if everyone else thinks of them as alive, but in actuality they're dead, it means they're not actually a Christian at all! Jesus was saying to that person, "When I come like a thief in the night, I'm not going to be coming *for* you. I'm going to come *against* you. So, you need to wake up!" Essentially, he was saying, "You think you have salvation, but you don't!"

According to many passages of Scripture, a person is dead before they are joined to Jesus. For example, Paul said, "In the past you were dead because of your sins and the things you did against God. Yes, in the past you lived the way the world lives... Though we were spiritually dead because of the things we did against God, he brought us to life with Christ."<sup>5</sup>

A person is dead before they receive the life of Jesus, and they are alive after being brought to life with Christ. So, if a person is calling themselves a Christian but Jesus is calling them dead, then Jesus is saying that that person is deceived – they think they have life, but really they're still completely dead and without true hope. A dead Christian is not a Christian at all. A dead "Christian" is only deceived into thinking he's a Christian.

Jesus was saying it's possible for a person (or an entire church) to think that they're alive – that they're Christians, that they have life with Jesus, that they're saved – when in fact, they're actually still dead – dead in their sins, without hope, without Jesus, and without salvation.

Think about the implications of that for the Church today. Think about the implications of that for yourself.

If it's possible for people to think they're alive, but actually be dead – to think they're Christians, but not actually be Christians – to think they're saved, but not actually be saved – then it's extremely important that we identify how to know the difference. After all, everybody thought the church in Sardis was alive – that was their reputation. But Jesus thought they were dead. So clearly everyone had the wrong definition of what it means to be alive. Everyone had the wrong definition of what it means to be a Christian!

What if that's true today? What if the Church today has the wrong definition of what it means to be a Christian?

The title *Dead Church* applies for two reasons:

First, because we live in a place and time in which the Western Church has a reputation of being alive. But, like the church in Sardis, what if everyone has the wrong definition of what it means to be alive? What if Christians today are deceived? What if, for whatever reason, Christians today don't know what it even means to be a Christian? According to Jesus, you can be dead and not realize it. According to Jesus, you can be dead while being fully convinced that you're alive. What if that's the state of the Church today? What if that's you? *Dead Church* addresses some of the ways that

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<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 2:1-2, 5

Christians today have the wrong definitions – ways they think they’re alive, when really they might be dead.

Second, we named this series *Dead Church* because when Jesus wrote to the church in Sardis, he didn’t leave them without hope. He told them to wake up. He told them to repent. He told them to overcome, and that if they overcame, he wouldn’t erase their names from the book of life. In short, he told them that there was something they could do about it. It wasn’t too late! They still had a chance! We wrote *Dead Church* because we want to see a dead Church come alive – we want to see them wake up – we want to see them repent – we want to see their names written in the book of life.

But to help a dead Church come alive, we must figure out what it means to be alive in the first place. To be able to help a dead Church mature and become all she is meant to be, we must first figure out what is wrong so she can change.

To recognize how a dead Church is dead, and how she can come alive again, we must recognize what Scripture teaches – not just individual verses here and there, but as a whole. And we must recognize the fact that the Old Testament provides us with examples that are warnings for us who live in the Church age.

The whole concept of *having a reputation of being alive, while actually being dead*, is not unique to the people who lived in Sardis. The entire Old Testament is filled with examples of people like that. And, as Paul said, “The things that happened to those people are examples. They were written down to warn us...”<sup>6</sup>

The stories in the Old Testament are meant to be examples for us. They were written down to teach us. So, what does the Old Testament teach us about thinking we’re alive when we’re actually dead?

In the Old Testament, while giving the Law to the nation of Israel, Moses gave the people this sober warning:

“I know that after I die you will become completely evil. You will turn away from the commands I have given you. Terrible things will happen to you in the future when you do what the LORD says is evil, and you will make him angry with the work of your hands.”<sup>7</sup>

This verse is just one example out of many throughout Deuteronomy 28-32 in which Moses repeatedly warned the Israelites that they would turn away from God.<sup>8</sup> In these chapters, Moses gave a very clear warning to the people that one day they would fall away from God, they would reject him, and as a result God would drive them into exile. It’s an incredible warning to read because it’s exactly what ended up happening to Israel over the course of the following eight hundred years or so.

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<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:11

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 31:29

<sup>8</sup> Ref. Leviticus 26:14-46; Deuteronomy 4:25-31, 28:15-68, 29:16-29, 30:1, 31:15-29, 32:15-18, 32:21-43

Moses warned them ahead of time. He warned them what they would do. He warned them what would happen to them. The nation of Israel had this warning from Moses with them every day. Right there, in their own nation's law, they were being told that the time would come when they would turn from God and be punished as a result.

How did they still let it happen?

Contrary to what a lot of Christians think, the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah didn't see themselves as people who had abandoned God. A lot of people don't realize this because the Bible was written from God's perspective – we read God's words about all the evil they were doing, and we just assume that their evil actions were as obvious to them as they are to us when we read about them today. But that wasn't their perspective.

Think of it this way: If I meet a man who is five-feet tall, will I think he's short? Yes. But will a three-year-old think he's short? No. A three-year-old would think he's tall. We have different perspectives. The Bible is written from God's perspective, and when we read it, we can clearly see that the Israelites were coming up short. But, if we read between the lines and look at the actions and responses of the Israelites, we can see that they had a different perspective – they thought they were “tall”.

The people of Israel thought they were obeying God and worshiping him. They thought everything was perfectly okay! They didn't see themselves as people who had rebelled against God or abandoned him.

In other words, they thought they were alive... but God said they were dead.

Here are some examples:

When God sent the prophet Isaiah to Israel to tell them to repent, he said, “The LORD says, ‘I do not want all these sacrifices. I have had enough of your burnt sacrifices of male sheep and fat from fattened cattle. I am not pleased by the blood of bulls, lambs, and goats. You worship me, but who asked you to do all this running in and out of my courts? Don't continue bringing me worthless sacrifices! I hate the incense you burn. I can't stand your New Moons, Sabbaths, and sacred assemblies; I can't stand the evil you do in your holy meetings. I hate your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts. They have become a burden to me, and I can no longer tolerate them. When you raise your arms to me in prayer, I will refuse to look at you. Even if you say many prayers, I will not listen to you...’”<sup>9</sup>

Notice the things the people did in this passage:

- They brought sacrifices to God
- They worshiped God
- They kept the New Moon feasts that God told them to keep in the Law

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<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 1:11-15

- They kept the Sabbath that God told them to keep in the Law
- They had the sacred assemblies that God told them to keep in the Law
- They had holy meetings
- They kept all the appointed feasts from the Law
- They raised their arms to God in prayer

Does this sound like a group of people who have fallen away from God? When you think of the rebellion of ancient Israel, is this what you picture?

This is the biblical description of the people who killed the prophets. We tend to picture them sitting around casually carving wooden statues and randomly calling them gods. We picture them as blatantly ignoring everything Moses wrote, refusing to pray to God, and refusing to bring sacrifices to him. But that's not what they were doing.

These people were still worshiping God, they were still bringing him their sacrifices, they were still keeping the feasts and Sabbaths, they were still meeting together, and they were still praying. Yet God said he hated what they were doing, and he wouldn't listen to their prayers.

Here's another example:

“The LORD says, ‘Shout out loud. Don't hold back. Lift up your voice like a trumpet. Tell my people what they have done against their God; tell the family of Jacob about their sins. They seek me every day and delight to learn my ways. They act just like a nation that does what is right, that obeys the commands of its God. They ask me to judge them fairly. They want to draw near to God. They say, “Why have we fasted, but you didn't see? Why have we afflicted ourselves, but you didn't notice?”’ But the LORD says, ‘Look, you do what pleases yourselves on these fast days, and you oppress your workers... You cannot do these things as you do now and believe your prayers are heard in heaven. Is this the fast that I want? Do I want a day when people afflict themselves? I don't want people just to bow their heads like a plant, stretching out on sackcloth and ashes. Is this what you call a fast? Do you really think this pleases the LORD?’”<sup>10</sup>

Notice what the people did in this passage:

- They sought God every day
- They delighted to learn his ways
- They acted as if they were people who did what was right
- They acted as if they were people who obeyed God
- They asked God for just judgment
- They wanted to draw near to God
- They fasted before God

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<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 58:1-5

- They prayed to God
- They bowed their heads to God

This is the description of Israel during the midst of their rebellion – at the height of their apostasy! They were not people who thought they were in rebellion! They were not people who had turned their backs on God.

God’s perspective was that they were evil, which is what we’re so familiar with – but their own perspective was that they were seeking God, delighting in him, drawing near to him, fasting to him, and praying to him. They thought they were people who did what was right. They thought they were people who obeyed God.

God said through the prophet Jeremiah, “Even the storks in the sky know the right times to do things. The doves, swallows, and cranes know when it is time to migrate. But my people don’t know what the LORD wants them to do. You keep saying, ‘We are wise, because we have the teachings of the LORD.’ But actually, those who explain the Scriptures have written lies with their pens.”<sup>11</sup>

We can see from this that the people of Judah were reading the teaching of the Lord, and they believed it gave them wisdom! They valued it! They thought it was wise to study Scripture and learn what Scripture meant! They thought they had more wisdom than all the other nations, because unlike those heathens, they had the teachings of God!

Over and over, if we look for the perspective of the people who were about to be judged, we can see that they didn’t realize they were disobeying God at all! They thought they still served God. They thought they still worshiped God.

This theme runs throughout all the writings of the prophets. When we read the writings of the prophets, we can see clearly that the people thought they were following God.

When Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem, King Zedekiah (one of the evil kings of Judah) sent for Jeremiah in order to receive a word from the Lord.<sup>12</sup> He wasn’t someone who thought he had rejected God! He wanted a word from God!

We see in Jeremiah, as well as in many other places, that Israel was full of false prophets<sup>13</sup> – and, yes, Christians understand that Israel was full of false prophets – but those false prophets were all coming in the name of the Lord, telling the people that they were sent by God! The people thought they were following God – and we see in many of the stories that even the false prophets themselves actually thought they were true prophets of God!<sup>14</sup>

We can also see that the people wanted to kill Jeremiah – not because they hated God and hated his prophet, but because they thought Jeremiah was speaking evil against

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<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 8:7-8

<sup>12</sup> Ref. Jeremiah 21

<sup>13</sup> Ref. Isaiah 3:12; Jeremiah 14:14-16, 23:9-32; Lamentations 2:14; Ezekiel 13

<sup>14</sup> Ref. Jeremiah 28

God when he said that the Temple of the Lord would be torn down.<sup>15</sup> They thought they were defending God!

We see that the people were coming to Ezekiel to hear what God had to say.<sup>16</sup>

In Hosea, we see the people were worshiping God and bringing him sacrifices.<sup>17</sup>

In Amos, we see that the people claimed that the Lord was with them, they kept the feasts, held sacred assemblies, offered sacrifices, sang songs, and excitedly anticipated the “day of the Lord.”<sup>18</sup>

Over and over, throughout the writings of the prophets we can see that the people of Israel were still offering sacrifices to God, they were still getting advice from God’s prophets, they were still keeping God’s feasts, they were still worshiping at the Temple, they were still praying to God, they were still fasting to God, they were still singing songs to God, they were still reading Scripture, they were still looking for a word from God, they were still listening to prophecy, they were still prophesying, and many other things like these.<sup>19</sup>

In short, the people didn’t recognize that they had turned their backs on God like Moses had prophesied. The people had a reputation of being alive. They thought of themselves as alive and in close relationship with God.

But really, they were dead.

In the end, God judged the nation. He drove them into exile, and he allowed his own Temple to be burned to the ground.

Moses had warned them about this when he gave them the Law. God warned the people before it happened by sending some of his own prophets to them. They had warnings. They were told it was coming. Yet despite all this, the people were shocked and caught completely off-guard when Jerusalem fell, thousands died, the Temple was burned to the ground, and the survivors were led off into exile. Somehow, despite all the warnings, no one saw it coming. The God they thought they worshiped came against them unexpectedly... like a thief in the night.

They were warned. They were told it would happen. But no one took it to heart. No one evaluated their culture to see if Moses’ warnings had come true.

This should be a sober warning and example for us in the Church Age, because just like Moses warned the people of Israel about their apostasy and exile long before it happened, Jesus and the apostles wrote similar warnings to the Church.

Paul said, “Brothers and sisters, we have something to say about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and the time when we will meet together with him... Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. That day of the Lord will not come until the apostasy

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<sup>15</sup> Ref. Jeremiah 26:7-9

<sup>16</sup> Ref. Ezekiel 33:30-33

<sup>17</sup> Ref. Hosea 5:6-7

<sup>18</sup> Ref. Amos 5:14, 5:18-24

<sup>19</sup> Ref. Jeremiah 2:23, 2:34-35, 3:10, 7:2-15, 8:8-9, 12:2, 14:11-16, 16:10-13, 18:18, 20:1-6, 21:1-14, 23:16-22, 23:30-32, 26:7-9, 27:14-15, 28:1-17, 36:6, 36:9, 37:17; Ezekiel 20:1-3, 20:30-31, 33:30-33; Hosea 5:6-7, 8:1-3, 8:12-14; Amos 5:14, 5:18-24; Micah 3:11-12; Zechariah 7:4-13; Malachi 1:6-14, 2:11-17

happens...”<sup>20</sup>

The word *apostasy* was a Greek word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint) to describe the actions of Israel during their rebellion. For example, in the Septuagint, Hezekiah (a good king of Judah) said that their fathers were *apostate* and did what was evil before the Lord.<sup>21</sup> Also, the actions of King Manasseh were called *apostasy*.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the word *apostasy* was used to describe the actions of the Jews who rebelled against God during the time of the Maccabees.<sup>23</sup>

The word *apostasy* or *apostate* essentially means *falling away* or *fallen away* respectively. Paul was saying that the day Jesus returns will not happen until the Church first falls away – just like Israel did in the Old Testament. His original audience would have understood what he was saying because, to them, the word *apostasy* referred to Israel’s rebellion against God.

Paul was warning that the Church would also fall away before Jesus returns.

Paul wrote other similar warnings, too:

“Now the Spirit clearly says that in the later times some people will abandon the faith. They will follow deceiving spirits and teachings of demons...”<sup>24</sup>

“I know that after I am gone, some people will come like wild wolves and try to destroy the flock. Even some from your own group will rise up and twist the truth and will lead away followers after them. So be careful!”<sup>25</sup>

“...the time will come when people will not listen to the true teaching but will find many more teachers who please them by saying the things they want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and will begin to follow false stories.”<sup>26</sup>

He also said, “Remember this! In the last days there will be terrible times, because people will love themselves, love money, brag, and be arrogant. 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 gossip, and will not control themselves. They will be cruel, will hate what is good, will turn against their friends, and will be reckless. They will be conceited, will love pleasure instead of God, and will act as if they serve God but will not have his power. Avoid those people.”<sup>27</sup>

It’s important to note here that when Paul said this, he was not saying the *world* will be like this – that’s what a lot of Christians today think. They think Paul was saying that this is what the world will look like in the last days and it’s going to be terrible. But Paul was not talking about the world; he was talking about the Church. He was saying that this is what the Church will look like. We know this because he ended this

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<sup>20</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

<sup>21</sup> Ref. 2 Chronicles 29:5-7, 29:19, 30:7

<sup>22</sup> Ref. 2 Chronicles 33:18-19

<sup>23</sup> Ref. 1 Maccabees 1:11-15, 2:15, 2:19

<sup>24</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1

<sup>25</sup> Acts 20:29-31

<sup>26</sup> 2 Timothy 4:3-4

<sup>27</sup> 2 Timothy 3:1-5

description by saying, “Avoid those people,” and elsewhere Paul clarified that when he said to avoid people who do certain things, he was not talking about the world – he was talking about those in the Church who do those things.<sup>28</sup>

So, Paul was saying that in the last days, it’s going to be terrible because the Church will be full of people who love themselves, love money, brag, etc. In this passage, Paul was saying the same thing he said elsewhere: Apostasy is coming. People will abandon the faith.

There are many other warnings just like this all throughout the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> Jesus warned us, Paul wrote about it many times, Peter warned us, and the entire book of Jude is filled with these warnings.

The point is, when Jesus and the apostles established the New Covenant, they warned us – just like Moses warned Israel, Jesus and the apostles warned us that the time would come when the Church would fall away from the truth and live in apostasy.

And just like we tend to read the Old Testament and not recognize that it was written from God’s perspective, we also tend to read the New Testament and assume that their warnings are something we’re going to easily see when it happens. For example, we read the book of Jude and we never consider, “What if Jude was describing me? What if he was describing today’s Church culture? What if his description is God’s perspective of my life?” Or, we read Paul’s warning mentioned earlier (about how it will be terrible times because people will love themselves, money, and pleasure) and we never consider, “What if I’m that person who loves money and pleasure instead of God?”

Just like Israel in the Old Testament, so many Christians are aware of these verses. But, they think it means people will be aware of the fact that they’re no longer following God. They think it means people will stop going to Church. They think it means people will stop thinking of themselves as Christians. But that’s not what Scripture warned us about – the New Testament writers repeatedly warned us that people would be deceived.<sup>30</sup>

By its very definition, if people are deceived, that means they don’t know.

The Bible warned us that the Church would fall away and people would be deceived. That means Jesus and the apostles warned us that the Church would fall into apostasy, but those apostate people would still go to Church, they would still believe in God, they would still read their Bibles, they would still pray, they would still sing worship songs, and many other things like these.

Just like the Israelites in the Old Testament, their perspective will be that they are serving God; but God’s perspective will be that they have committed adultery against him, apostasy against him, and have completely abandoned him.

Very few Christians recognize the example in the Old Testament: God warned

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<sup>28</sup> Ref. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

<sup>29</sup> Ref. Matthew 7:15-23, 13:24-30, 24:10-13; Mark 4:1-20; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Peter 2:1-22

<sup>30</sup> Ref. Mark 13:6; 2 Peter 2:1-2, 2:18-19

his people that they would fall away and that it would result in destruction, he gave them very clear warnings, but despite all this, the people didn't recognize that they already had fallen away. They had holy meetings for God, raised their arms in prayer to God, bowed their heads to God, sang worship songs to God, fasted for God, prophesied for God, read Scripture, and many other similar things. They didn't recognize that the apostasy had already happened. Convinced that they were serving God, convinced that they were just fine, they surrounded themselves with false prophets and false teachers who reinforced what they already believed and told them what they wanted to hear.

We should expect the fulfillment of the New Testament warnings to be similar. We have been warned by Jesus and the apostles that the Church would fall away, and that it would result in destruction. We were given very clear warnings. But despite the warnings, Christians won't recognize the apostasy. They will have holy meetings, raise their arms in prayer, bow their heads, sing worship songs, fast, prophesy, read Scripture, and many other similar things. They won't recognize that it has already happened. Convinced that they are serving God, convinced that they are perfectly fine, they will surround themselves with false prophets, false teachers, and other false believers who will reinforce what they already believe, and reassure them by telling them all the things they want to hear.

The warnings given to Israel were the same warnings given to the Church. We should expect the fulfillment of those warnings to be identical as well.

Despite the countless times Scripture tells us that people will be deceived, most Christians still assume that they would recognize apostasy if they saw it. Most Christians ignore the warnings and continue living life exactly like all the other Christians around them.

Very few Christians recognize another lesson from the Old Testament: the apostasy committed in Israel in the Old Testament was not a *minority* of the people. In other words, the apostasy was committed by *the overwhelming majority*. It was such a vast majority that Elijah honestly thought he was the only person left who truly served God.<sup>31</sup> Jeremiah described himself as “sitting alone.”<sup>32</sup>

The New Testament warns us that it will be the same with the Church. Many Christians might think the apostasy is only that denomination over there, or these Christians here who have accepted some new teaching. But that's denying what Scripture says. Paul said the times will be terrible because so many people will be apostate. Jesus said you will be able to recognize a false teacher simply by seeing if they're widely loved.<sup>33</sup> Jesus warned us that few would find the path to life,<sup>34</sup> but the apostles warned us that many would be deceived.

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<sup>31</sup> Ref. 1 Kings 19:1-18

<sup>32</sup> Ref. Jeremiah 16:16-17

<sup>33</sup> Ref. Luke 6:26

<sup>34</sup> Ref. Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:22-27

The pattern in Scripture is abundantly clear: God works with a minority – a remnant – look at Noah, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and Caleb, Gideon, Elijah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets. Look at the many thousands who followed Jesus around, yet he only showed himself to five hundred when he resurrected.

Most people will not choose to follow him – even if they think they did.

Peter wrote a warning to Christians. He said, “There used to be false prophets among God’s people just as you will have some false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce things that are wrong – teachings that will cause people to be lost.”<sup>35</sup>

Peter was warning us that there would be many false teachings circling around that fool many people into thinking they are saved when they really are not. Just like in Israel, these false teachings would give people a confidence that they are right with God. People would be confident that they are truly saved and truly born again. But because they are believing a lie instead of the truth, their confidence does them no good.

This is exactly what has happened in the Church. Countless people go in and out of their church services every Sunday, they read their Bibles, they pray, they sing worship songs, and they have emotional experiences when they feel close to God. They go seek out prophecy, and they themselves prophesy. But they don’t submit to Jesus, their lives don’t change, they continue in sin, and they are dead.

As Jesus warned the church in Sardis, if these people do not repent, the day of the Lord will come against them like a thief in the night – just like it did to apostate Israel in the Old Testament.

We need to understand the difference between a dead Church and a living Church.

Throughout this series, we are going to address the following topics:

We’re going to talk about false teaching. The New Testament is full of warnings about false teachers. We’re going to look at those warnings. We’re going to look at how the Bible says to recognize and avoid false teaching. And we’re going to look at how prevalent false teaching is in the Church today.

We’re going to address *faith*, *repentance*, and *love*, and how we (the Church) have adopted the wrong definitions of these words. We’re going to look at how the Bible defines *faith*, *repentance*, and *love*, and we’re going to show how our wrong definitions have affected everything about our mindset, our actions, the way we view the Bible, and what we think we understand. In short, we’re going to look at how our wrong definitions of *faith*, *repentance*, and *love*, have (like Sardis) given us the wrong definition of what it means to be alive.

We’re going to talk about mainstream Christian views about the gospel, legalism, and condemnation. We’re going to point out how many lies we’ve just accepted, how

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<sup>35</sup> 2 Peter 2:1

many things we just assume, and how much about what we believe is simply not biblical at all.

We're going to look at the modern Christian life, and all the things that we think of today as "what the Christian life should look like." We're then going to compare those things to the lives of the Pharisees, and then compare them to the commands Jesus gave his followers. And we'll evaluate whether the modern Christian life looks more like what Jesus came to establish, or what Jesus came to oppose.

We're going to look at the practical examples the Bible gives about what it really means to seek first the kingdom of God and love him above everything, and how our actions clearly show us whether we're doing that or not.

We're going to talk about what it truly means to abide in Jesus, and when we should expect our prayers to be answered and when we should not expect them to be answered, and why. We'll look at some conditions the Bible gives for these promises – conditions that Christians usually overlook.

If it's possible to think you're alive when you're not, and if it's possible to think you're a Christian when you're not, and if false teaching is as prevalent as the Bible says it will be, then Christians need a way to know the difference between what is true and what are lies. We'll look at how the Bible tells us exactly how we can know.

We're going to look at apostasy one more time. Based on everything else we discuss in this series, how can a Christian have assurance of salvation and know that they're not living in apostasy? Furthermore – how do we respond to apostasy when we see it in the Church?

Finally, we'll wrap up the series by going over dozens of relevant Scripture verses on some of the topics we're discussing to show that these are things the Bible teaches consistently. The Bible is not a collection of individual, unrelated verses. The Bible teaches the same things from beginning to end. In other words, these topics are things that God brings up a lot throughout the Bible. And if they're things God brings up a lot in the Bible, then they're things God cares about a lot. And if God has something that he cares about a lot, then we would do well to pay close attention to what he has to say.

This series was born out of a deep desire to see the Church restored to what we see in the book of Acts – a Church walking in the kind of love, power, and life that is unstoppable. A Church bearing the kind of fruit we are supposed to bear. A Church that looks like Jesus. This series was written because I deeply love the Church of Jesus. I love his bride, and I want to see her grow out of the human traditions that are holding her back, and step into maturity. I want to see Christians come to experience true life – the kind of life we read about in the book of Acts. I want to see Christians begin to realize just how worthwhile it is to actually surrender everything and live for Jesus. I want to see Christians realize what that even means!

Some of what is written in this series might challenge you. It might go against

what you've always thought or what you've always been taught. It might be uncomfortable. It might even be downright painful at times. But I encourage you to go to Scripture yourself to see if what I say is true. Go to Scripture, read it, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what is true. Because you must know the truth. If it's possible for a person to think they're alive, and to live in a culture that has a reputation of being alive, when they're actually dead, then it's possible that what you've always thought and what you've always been taught is not actually the truth – and perhaps you don't have the life you think you have.

I don't expect or ask that anyone take my word for it. I don't want you to take my word for it. I just want to challenge you to go to Scripture and make sure that your perspective matches God's perspective. And if it doesn't, what needs to change?

I pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus would bless you and teach you as you read the rest of this series.

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(A free video version of this series is also available on [www.ActsInitiative.com](http://www.ActsInitiative.com).)