

Dead Church Podcast Notes

Acts Initiative

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Ep. 2 – We’ve Become Christian Pharisees

Throughout this series we will address many things Christians commonly misunderstand in the Church today. But in order for us to address those topics, we must first lay a foundation so we understand *why* it’s so important that we address these things.

Many Christians in recent years have begun asking: *Why do we do what we do? Why do we do Church on Sunday the way we do it? Why do we live the way we live? When I read the Bible, I see people doing things differently than what we do today. Why is that?*

They’re questioning the status-quo. They’re re-evaluating how we do Church. It is often referred to as the *House-Church Movement*.

Personally, I have greatly benefited from people asking these questions. They are changing standard Christian practices; they’re changing the way we approach Church. They are sparking questions and re-evaluating common traditions. Maybe you haven’t been a part of those movements; maybe you haven’t even heard of them. But essentially, these people are saying, “We want to look like what they looked like in the Bible in the Book of Acts. We don’t want to look like religion.”

They’re recognizing that Christianity has largely become “religious” today. They are addressing the rituals and customs – the things we do within this religious version of Christianity. They’re meeting in homes instead of church buildings, they’re eating meals together, and they’re having everyone actively participate in their meetings. They’re looking at the way Church was done in the first century, and they’re trying to imitate it.

They want to see Christianity restored to what we see in the book of Acts. They want to see Christianity restored to what God always intended it to be.

I love what these folks are doing, and I’ve benefited a lot from their questions as they challenged me to re-think what Church is supposed to look like. I’ve benefited as they’ve challenged me to ask questions rather than just let myself get swept away by the flow of the vast majority.

However, something I’ve noticed as I’ve observed these movements is that they’re questioning *what* we do – they’re questioning the rituals, they’re questioning the traditions – but a lot of people are not questioning the theology and doctrines behind those rituals.

They’re re-evaluating the traditions and changing the structure of Church to get that structure in line with what we see in the Bible, but they’re not re-evaluating or changing the beliefs, doctrines, theology and teaching which we received from the same men who gave us the religious traditions and structures in the first place.

For example, a popular house-church movement is changing everything about how they function as a Church. They’re meeting in homes, they’re keeping the groups small, they’re meeting more than once a week, they’re having an open discussion instead of the traditional sermon, and they’re eating meals together. But, when they meet, instead of reading Scripture and Scripture alone, they’re reading Scripture *and* a popular theological book that teaches the doctrines of their denomination.

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They’re not re-evaluating *everything*. They’re not starting from the ground up. They’re not asking *all* the questions they should be asking. They still trust their doctrines. They still trust their denomination. They want to change Church structure – but they don’t want to change their beliefs.

These people are asking why we have our meetings a certain way, but they’re missing the big picture: In the early Church, Christianity wasn’t about meetings. In the early Church, Christianity was a lifestyle. It was a culture. It was an alternative society. It was its own kingdom. In the early Church, Christianity completely redefined and consumed your life.

If we start meeting in homes, but our lives aren’t redefined, then it still isn’t the same Christianity that existed in the first century.

We cannot merely try to change Church structure and functions while still holding to the doctrine and theology we received from the “institutional Church.” We must also re-evaluate the most important component: The early Church was defined by their beliefs – not by any kind of structure. In other words, they *did* what they did because they *believed* what they believed. Their meetings didn’t look a certain way just because they arbitrarily decided to structure it that way. Their meetings looked a certain way because what they were doing was directly correlated to what they believed.

So, to understand what we should be doing, we need to understand *why* we’re doing it. We need to make sure we believe the right things. We need to question the theology. We need to question the doctrines. We need to question the teaching we’ve received.

If you only question what we do and how we do it, but you don’t question the theology behind it, then you’re not addressing the real problem.

Furthermore, if you only address the structure, then there will inevitably be a lot of people who see it and say, “Well that’s really cool that you do that, but I do things a different way.”

This is one of the most common responses among people who don’t want to change the status-quo. They respond, “You have your way; I have my way.” But this isn’t biblical. The early Christians in the first Church did things a certain way for a reason. Their Church structure was what it was because of their beliefs. The way they did Church was directly influenced by what they believed. It wasn’t something that some people could accept, and others could just find a different way of doing things.

The way the first Christians did Church was fundamentally different than the way modern Christians do Church. This was because their idea of what it means to be a Christian was fundamentally different than the modern idea of what it means to be a Christian.

It’s not enough to just change the traditions, rituals, and structure. The theology needs to be addressed, too.

So, the first question we must address is this:

Why is it important that Christians re-evaluate the theology and doctrines they believe?

To answer this question, we must look at what Scripture tells us. We must look at the warnings found in Scripture and evaluate our beliefs and lifestyle in light of those warnings.

Remember what we saw in the first video – Israel was warned by Moses that they would fall away. They were warned that they would become completely evil. They were warned that their actions would bring about their own destruction.¹

Yet, despite those warnings, they fell away and thought they hadn’t fallen away. They became evil, but still thought they were holy. They chose the road to destruction, but they still thought they were on the road to life. Despite believing the words of Moses were true, they lived as if they thought the warnings from Moses were false. They didn’t take his warnings to heart. They didn’t re-

¹ 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

evaluate their own lives in light of his warnings. No one paused and thought, “if Moses’ warnings are true, then something must be wrong about what we’re doing – because he said we would be evil.” No one stopped. No one second-guessed what they were doing. No one let his words really sink in.

They measured themselves by their own perspective. They didn’t look at their lives from God’s perspective, and they didn’t use Scripture alone as their standard.

Furthermore, the Old Testament Israelites are not our only examples. During the time of Jesus, the people of Israel had made the same mistake yet again.

We tend to read the gospel accounts without recognizing the perspective of the people who lived at that time. We read the words of Jesus. We read the descriptions of the apostles. We read their stories from their perspective, and we forget that their perspective wasn’t everyone’s perspective.

For example, we read about the Pharisees and think, “Man, those guys were awful. They were stuck up, they were arrogant, they were hateful, they were hypocrites, and they were murderers.” In our minds, we associate the Pharisees with negative things. But that wasn’t the perspective of the people at that time.

At the time of Jesus, the Pharisees were considered the godliest men alive. They were the people who tried the hardest to obey God. They were the ones who cared the most about God. They were the equivalent of today’s pastors, preachers, Sunday-school teachers, and small group leaders. The perspective of the people was that the Pharisees were examples of what it meant to obey God. They believed the Pharisees were righteous. They believed the Pharisees served God.

Why is all this important?

It is important because it demonstrates how easy it is for an entire culture to think they’re serving God when they’re not. It provides an example for us of what it will look like when the Church falls away.

Their example is important today because Christians do the same thing the Israelites and the Pharisees did. Christians, often without realizing it, evaluate themselves by comparing themselves to their Christian culture. In other words, they decide what a Christian life should look like by looking at all the Christians around them. So, when they assimilate and begin to live like everyone else around them, they become convinced that they’re pleasing God.

Paul wrote about Christians who did this. He said, “They use themselves to measure themselves, and they judge themselves by what they themselves are. What fools!”²

If you evaluate yourself against yourself, you’re being a fool. When you evaluate yourself against your own culture, you’re doing the same thing – you’re measuring yourself by yourself. You make yourself, your culture, and your friends the standard you’re trying to live up to – instead of the Bible. You make the modern Christian culture your standard – instead of what Jesus taught.

Paul also said, “If anyone thinks he is something when he really is not, he is only deceiving himself. Each person should examine his own actions and not compare himself with others.”³

If you think you’re a Christian, when really you’re not, you are deceiving yourself. If you think you’re alive, when really you’re dead, you are deceived. So, you shouldn’t compare yourself with others. If you conclude that you are alive and saved because you compared yourself to the Christian culture around you, you might be deceived! You might be doing the same thing the Israelites and the Pharisees did! If you are living up to the standard of the modern Church, you might still not be living up to God’s standard! You cannot compare yourself to those around you!

² 2 Corinthians 10:12

³ Galatians 6:3-4

You cannot look at Christianity today and assume that you have life with Jesus just because you’re living up to the standard of modern Christianity.

Most Christians know this, yet most Christians do it anyway without realizing it. They think they’re comparing themselves to the Bible, but they’re reading their own culture and their own beliefs into the text.

For example, a Christian might say, “I don’t believe that any Christian is ever going to stop sinning.” Yet the Bible clearly says that everyone who knows Christ does not go on sinning, and anyone who does go on sinning is a child of the devil – not a child of God.⁴ And Paul said that you can only have life if you put sin completely to death.⁵

But instead of looking at the Bible, Christians look at themselves and say, “I’m a Christian, and I keep sinning, and everyone around me is a Christian, and they keep sinning... therefore, Christians will always keep on sinning.” They use themselves and those around them as their standard instead of the Bible, and they never once stop to consider, “What if I’m not actually a Christian? What if all the warnings in the Bible about Christians being deceived and led into destruction were talking about me and those around me? Maybe the Bible’s description of a Christian is more accurate than my own.”

Christians read the Bible, and think they’re following the Bible, but they fail to recognize that it describes a Christian life that is radically different than anything currently happening in mainstream Christianity. Instead of changing their lifestyle to match Scripture, they change their lifestyle to match the lives of so-called “Christians” around them. Furthermore, they’re willing to live a lifestyle that is radically different than what they see in Scripture because they accept a gospel and salvation process that is radically different than what is found in Scripture. Their lifestyle is shaped by what they believe. Their beliefs tell them that it is acceptable to live a life contrary to the examples set in Scripture. Their beliefs tell them that the Christian culture around them is just as acceptable to God as the culture of the first Church in the New Testament.

The Israelites thought they were righteous before God because their lifestyles matched their beliefs about God. The Pharisees thought they were justified before God because their actions lined up with their own beliefs. And Christians today decide whether or not they are living according to Scripture by comparing their lives to what they believe Scripture teaches. They use their doctrines and theology to justify themselves. As long as they believe their lives are in line with Scripture, they have no real reason to change.

Once again, our beliefs shape what we do. The early Church did what they did because they believed what they believed. The Church today does what it does because they believe what they believe.

But what if the beliefs of the Church today are wrong? What if the Church today believes the wrong thing, and as a result, lives the wrong way? What if the Church today is just as wrong as the Pharisees were? What if the Church today is just as wrong as Ancient Israel? What would the implications be? What would that mean for you when you stand before God on judgment day?

We cannot blindly choose to conform to the standard Christian culture. We cannot determine what our lives should look like by using Christians around us as our examples. We cannot blindly accept what the Church teaches, and we cannot blindly accept how Christians live.

Why?

Because just like Moses warned Israel about their coming apostasy, Jesus and the apostles warned us that the same thing would happen. They warned us about false teachers, false brothers,

⁴ Ref. 1 John 3:4-10, 5:18

⁵ Ref. Romans 8:12-13

and false prophets. They warned us to not follow men. They warned us to not allow ourselves to be deceived.

Scripture warned us that apostasy was coming. It warned us, just like Moses warned the Israelites, that many would fall away and be deceived. The apostasy of Ancient Israel and the Pharisees is a picture of what it will look like when the Church commits apostasy as well. When the Church is in apostasy, everyone in the Church will still think they're serving God. Everyone will still sing songs to God. Everyone will still pray to God. Everyone will still read Scripture. Everyone will still call Jesus, "Lord."⁶ They will hold certain beliefs about Scripture which will justify their actions. They will hold to certain teachings, doctrines, and theologies which will give them a false assurance before God. Their beliefs will shape what they do – but their beliefs will be just as wrong as the Ancient Israelites and the Pharisees.

If we want to avoid being included in that apostasy, we must do what the Israelites failed to do: We must take the warnings in Scripture seriously. We must take the warnings to heart and recognize that those warnings were given to us for a reason. We can't just ignore them, and we can't just assume that our ideas about Christianity are the correct ideas. We can't assume that we have everything figured out.

God told us about the apostasy ahead of time, and he told us how to avoid it.

Jesus said, "Be careful of false prophets. They come to you disguised like sheep, but underneath they are ferocious wolves. You will know these people by their fruit."⁷

Jesus also said, "Many false prophets will arise and deceive many."⁸

In these passages, Jesus warned us about false prophets. As we mentioned in the first video, this warning would have immediately resonated with his original audience. The Jewish people would have immediately thought of all the false prophets in the Old Testament who had deceived the Jewish people and led them away from God. The prophets in Ancient Israel were more than just people who predicted the future – the prophets were those who told the people what God wanted – they explained the Scriptures, they were teachers, they helped the people know what was right and what was wrong.

The false prophets were men who stepped into this role, but taught the wrong things. They didn't tell the people to turn from their sin. They told the people God loved them. They told the people God would bless them. They told the people to keep doing what they were doing. They used Scripture to lead the people away from God – but they had the people convinced that they were leading them closer to God.

Jesus was warning us that this would happen again. He was warning those who followed him that false prophets would once again rise up – this time, in the Church. He was warning us to not be deceived – to not be like the Ancient Israelites who blindly followed their teachers. He was warning us that many people would come who would claim to be teaching Scripture, speaking for God, and leading us closer to God – but that they would actually be leading people astray. He was warning us that we need to pay attention – we need to make sure that we're believing what is true, and as a result, doing what God actually wants. He was warning us that, once again, false prophets would begin telling people that God loves them, that God would bless them, and that they should keep doing what they're already doing. Instead of preaching repentance (as all the true prophets did), they would teach "Christians" that God favors them, even though they continue doing what God hates.

Peter wrote a similar warning:

⁶ Ref. Matthew 7:21-23

⁷ Matthew 7:15-16

⁸ Matthew 24:11

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“There used to be false prophets among God’s people just as you will have some false teachers among you. They will introduce destructive heresies. They will even deny the Master who bought them. So they will bring quick destruction on themselves. Many will follow their evil ways and slander the way of truth.”⁹

Peter was saying the same thing Jesus said: The same thing that happened to Israel in the Old Testament will happen again to the Church. The Church will have false teachers telling people they’re okay, teaching something that is not the truth. The Church will have false teachers giving us the wrong beliefs, the wrong doctrine, and the wrong theology. By convincing us of the wrong beliefs, they would also convince us that we’re serving God when we’re actually rejecting the commands of God for the sake of our own traditions.¹⁰ The Church will have false teachers telling us that we’re pleasing God, when really God hates what we’re doing. The story of Israel’s apostasy in the Old Testament is exactly what we should expect to see in the Church.

Jesus also said, “Woe to you when everyone speaks well about you, because their ancestors did the same things to the false prophets.”¹¹

In other words, people only speak well about false teachers and false prophets. They like to listen to the people who tell them what they want to hear. Jesus was warning that this would continue through the Church age: the majority of people will follow false teachers and speak well of false teachers. Those who truly follow Jesus won’t be popular. They won’t be loved by the masses. If you are a Christian teacher and virtually everyone speaks well about you, you’re in trouble. That’s how people treat false prophets. People don’t treat real prophets that way. Furthermore, if you’re following a teacher who is well-loved, you are also in trouble. Only false-prophets are well-loved. And we were warned that those who follow them will be led to destruction.

Just like Israel had false prophets among them, so too, the Church will be full of false prophets. Those false prophets will teach from Scripture, they will teach doctrine and theology. They will convince the masses to believe the wrong information, and that wrong information would convince the people that they are right with God – when they’re not. Those false beliefs, false doctrines, and false theologies would be the foundation for their deception. As a result of believing the wrong information, the people would live wrong. They would disobey God and fall into apostasy – all while thinking they’re doing what is right and pleasing God with their lives.

The false teaching, false doctrine, and false theology would result in Christians having the wrong beliefs. Those wrong beliefs would shape what they would do.

Paul also warned us that false teachers would come: “...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.”¹²

Once again, the apostles warned us that the time would come when Christians would follow false teachers – they would follow teachers who teach the things they want to hear. They would turn from the truth. They would follow lies.

This warning is found repeatedly throughout the New Testament. Paul also said, “I know that after I am gone, some people will come like wild wolves and will not spare 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!”¹³

⁹ 2 Peter 2:1-2

¹⁰ Ref. Matthew 15:3,6

¹¹ Luke 6:26

¹² 2 Timothy 4:3-4

¹³ Acts 20:29-31

Paul wrote to Timothy, “Now the Spirit clearly says that in the later times some people will abandon the faith. They will devote themselves to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons. Such teachings come from the false words of liars whose consciences are branded as if by a hot iron.”¹⁴

The warning of Jesus and the apostles was clear and abundant: False teachers and false prophets would come. They would teach lies as truth, and many would be deceived by them. They would lead people to destruction just as the false prophets led the Israelites to destruction. They would convince Christians to believe the wrong information – and that incorrect information would result in Christians living the wrong way, doing the wrong things. It would result in apostasy. It would result in rebellion. Just like Israel and just like the Pharisees, Christians would think they were serving God, but they would be deceived. They would believe lies, and it would result in their destruction.

Shortly after many of the apostles were killed, Jude summarized their warning:

“Dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ prophesied. They said to you, ‘In the last times there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly desires.’ These are the people who divide you, people whose thoughts are only of this world, who do not have the Spirit.”¹⁵

This summary in Jude came at the conclusion of a long description of false brothers and false teachers. Jude wrote an entire letter to address the fact that false teachers would lead people astray, and in this verse, he reminded his audience that this was the same warning that all the apostles had prophesied.

These verses are just a few examples. Jesus and the apostles repeatedly warned us that false teachers would come. They warned us to not be deceived. They warned us that many people would follow them, and they warned us that it would result in destruction.

Jesus said, “Enter through the narrow gate. The gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and many people enter through that gate. But the gate is small and the road is difficult that leads to true life. Only a few people find that road.”¹⁶

Think about the comparison.

Jesus said that only a few people will enter life, but he also said that false prophets would come and deceive many.¹⁷ Peter also said that many would be deceived and led into destruction.¹⁸

Only a few will enter life. And many will be deceived.

We need to compare those two statements and realize that if many are deceived and only a few enter life, then we cannot look at the majority of Christianity and follow their lead. We cannot blindly accept their beliefs and their lifestyle. The majority will go to destruction. The majority will be deceived – they will believe the wrong things, and as a result, they will live the wrong way. Only the minority will find life.

Scripture warned us that false teachers would come. They would teach things that are a lie, and many would be deceived. If you follow them, you will end up in destruction.

Many people will be deceived by false teachers and false teaching.

Few people will find life.

If many are going to be deceived by false teaching, then we need to make sure we’re not among them.

Scripture warns us that false teachers and false believers will be everywhere. It will be just like the false prophets in ancient Israel. And, many – the majority – will be deceived by them.

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 4:1-2

¹⁵ Jude 17-19

¹⁶ Matthew 7:13-14

¹⁷ Ref. Matthew 24:11

¹⁸ Ref. 2 Peter 2:1-2

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We were warned. We were told ahead of time what to expect. We were told false teachers would come. We were told false brothers would come. Just like Moses warned Israel, Jesus and the apostles warned us. This is our reality. Either these warnings are true today, or the Bible is a lie and Jesus was a liar. Either these false teachers are leading countless people to destruction today, or nothing about the Bible is true.

Christians must begin to accept this reality and take this warning to heart, because accepting this reality would drastically change how Christians interact with all the books, sermons, conferences, blogs, videos, music, doctrines, and theologies that circulate the world today.

We were warned about the time we live in. We were warned that false teachers would come. We were warned that many would be deceived.

This is why it is important for Christians to re-evaluate more than just the structure and rituals of Church. Christians must begin questioning everything – including their doctrine, their theology, their beliefs, and their own salvation. Scripture warned us that the Church would fall away. Scripture warned us that false teachers would lead many astray. Christians must begin to stop and say, “If this is true, then something *must* be wrong about Christianity today – because Jesus and the apostles prophesied that the Church would fall away and begin to believe lies. If something *isn’t* wrong about Christianity today, then Jesus and the apostles were false prophets.” If Christians really believed the Bible is true, they would believe this warning is true as well. If Christians really believed the Bible is true, they would stop being confident in their own beliefs and the doctrines of their preferred denomination.

Either Scripture is right, and the majority of teachers in the world today are teaching lies, or Scripture is wrong, in which case it shouldn’t be trusted about anything. Either Scripture is right, and the majority of Christians in the world today are deceived by false teaching, or Scripture is wrong, in which case, *every* Christian in the world today is deceived by false teaching.

If we believe the Bible can be trusted, then we need to come to terms with what it tells us. If we believe the Bible can be trusted, then we need to start trusting what it tells us about our current reality.

The Bible tells us that we live in a time when false teachers are everywhere, and the majority of Christians are deceived. The Bible tells us that false prophets are disguised like Christians, leading people to destruction by teaching people the wrong things about God and the wrong things about how to be saved.

Do you believe the Bible? Or do you believe the modern Church?

Do you read Scripture, and Scripture alone? Or do you also read a theology book? Do you get your understanding from the teachers in your denomination? Or do you rely solely on Scripture?

Do you take these warnings seriously? Are you willing to consider the possibility that all the teachers you’re familiar with are wrong, and most of the Christians you know are deceived? Are you willing to accept the reality given to you by the Bible?

Either this warning is true, and God’s perspective of the modern Church is completely different than our own perspective – or the Bible is wrong, which means we can’t trust anything in it at all.

Identifying the Truth

Most Christians think they know how to evaluate the truth and identify false teachers. They’re aware of these warnings, but they think they already know how to respond. They think these warnings are about certain other teachers. They think the warnings refer to some other denomination or other Christian sects. They judge what is true by comparing it to what they already believe.

But they believe what they were taught... by men.

Christians today often make the mistake of thinking that they would be able to recognize false teaching if they saw it. They don't comprehend what it means to be *deceived*. They think they already know the truth. They never question whether or not they already are deceived. They evaluate everything according to the doctrines of their own denomination. They evaluate everything according to the theology they've received from men. They evaluate everything against what they already believe.

What's worse – they think they're evaluating everything against Scripture. But they're convinced Scripture says what they were told it says. They've been trained to read Scripture a certain way – trained to see certain doctrines and theologies where they don't exist. They're convinced they know Scripture, but they really only know what they've been told Scripture says.

Like the Pharisees and Ancient Israel, most Christians today refuse to even consider the possibility that everything they currently believe is a lie. They're convinced they know the Bible. They're convinced they know what Scripture teaches. They're convinced they know the truth. They're convinced they believe what they believe because it's what the Bible says. And they're blind to the fact that they believe what they believe because it's what men have said.

I don't ask you to take me at my word. I don't ask you to just blindly believe what I say. All I ask is that you recognize the warnings in Scripture and consider their implications. If Scripture warned you that false teachers will come and many will be deceived, why are you so confident that you're not one of them? The Israelites were confident, too. The Pharisees were extremely confident. They all had Scripture. They all read it every day. They were all convinced that Scripture taught what they believed – just like most Christians today.

Are you willing to consider the possibility that perhaps you have things wrong? Are you willing to consider the possibility that what you believe is not what the Bible actually says? Your life is on the line. You were warned that this would be something to watch for. To ignore this and hold to your beliefs without questioning them is arrogance – it is arrogantly believing that you're already right, and you've got everything figured out. Like the Pharisees, it's hard-heartedness and a stiff neck. It's refusing to re-evaluate yourself. It's refusing to consider God's warnings and take them seriously.

Why would you assume that you already know the correct information when God explicitly warned you many times that false teachers would fill the Church, teach lies, and many would be deceived – resulting in their destruction? Why wouldn't that cause you to stop and re-evaluate things? That's exactly what Israel failed to do in the Old Testament. They had the warnings in Scripture. They had the warnings of Moses. But they failed to ever stop and re-evaluate. They didn't take his warnings seriously. They just kept doing what they were already doing.

Many Christians also make the mistake of thinking that if a teacher reads the Bible and quotes the Bible, then they are teaching what the Bible says. They learn the theology and doctrines of their denomination, they look at all the Bible verses that are used to back up those ideas, and they become convinced that the Bible teaches what they were taught.

I've heard many Christians talk about how they want to be part of a Church that preaches the Bible. They want to be somewhere where the Word of God is read every Sunday. They seem to think that if they hear Scripture read, then they're hearing the truth. But that's not necessarily true. False teachers use Scripture, too. We were warned that they would twist Scripture. Peter warned us, "Some things in Paul's letters are hard to understand, and people who are ignorant and unstable twist them. They also twist the other Scriptures, which will lead to their destruction."¹⁹

¹⁹ 2 Peter 3:16

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False teachers will read the Bible. They will teach from the Bible. Many Christians will go to churches that read the Bible and preach from God’s Word. But they will hear lies. Those men will twist Scripture. They will make it say something it doesn’t say. They will convince their audience to believe the Bible teaches something it doesn’t teach. They will use Scripture to lead people to destruction.

During the apostasy of Ancient Israel in the Old Testament, God said, “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. These wise teachers rejected the word of the LORD, so what wisdom is in them? They will be humiliated. They will be shocked and trapped.”²⁰

Like many Christians today, the Israelites also thought they were wise because they had the teachings of the Lord. They thought their teachers were teaching the truth because their teachers quoted a lot of Scripture. But they were believing the explanations and doctrines of men. They thought they were hearing Scripture, but they were really hearing the words of men who claimed to explain Scripture. They were believing the words of men who taught lies, and used Scripture to back up their lies. Jesus and Peter said that the false teachers in the Church would be just like the false prophets in Ancient Israel. The false prophets in Ancient Israel used Scripture. They taught Scripture. They read Scripture. They quoted Scripture.

Just because someone quotes the Bible, reads the Bible, and references the Bible doesn’t mean they’re teaching the truth! Just because you go to a Church that reads the Bible doesn’t mean they’re leading you toward life! False teachers will quote the Bible! Even Satan quoted Scripture when he tempted Jesus!²¹

Many Christians choose their Church based on how much Scripture is read – but they end up being indoctrinated with the false teachings of men. They think they can back everything up with Scripture, but they only learn to read Scripture through the lens of what they were taught. They learn to see certain doctrine and theology in Scripture that isn’t actually there! They learn to see a gospel message in Scripture that none of the apostles actually taught!

The New Testament repeatedly warned us about false teachers, false brothers, and false prophets. It is easily the biggest warning in the New Testament – a huge warning that most Christians don’t really pay attention to. They think they pay attention to it, but all they really do is pick their favorite teachers and follow them. They pick the denomination and doctrines they like best, and they follow those teachers. They think they can evaluate the truth, but they can only evaluate whether or not something lines up with what they have been taught. Their standard of measurement is their denomination, with its doctrines, theologies, and teachers.

This is how Christians become deceived without knowing they’re deceived. They think they know the truth. They think they know the Bible. They think they know how to evaluate what is real. But they’re no different than the Pharisees. They’re no different than the Israelites.

Paul warned the Corinthians that they should not blindly accept what they were being taught – even if people taught about Jesus and preached “the gospel.” He said, “You gladly tolerate anyone who comes to you and preaches a different Jesus from the one we preached. You are very willing to accept a spirit that is different from the Spirit you received, or a gospel that is different from the one you received from us.”²²

His warning was clear: Not everyone who preaches about Jesus is preaching the true Jesus. Not everyone who receives a spirit is receiving the Spirit of God. Not every gospel message is the true gospel message. In other words, some teachers might teach about Jesus, claim to preach the

²⁰ Jeremiah 8:8-9

²¹ Ref. Matthew 4:5-6; Luke 4:9-11

²² 2 Corinthians 11:4

gospel, and pray for you to receive the Spirit, but that doesn't mean you should accept them. That doesn't make them true Christians. That doesn't prove that they're real. They might be preaching a false Jesus: They might use his name, but that doesn't mean they're teaching you anything about who he actually is or what he requires. They might be preaching a gospel that is completely different than the one preached in Scripture: They teach about the cross, and they teach about forgiveness, but maybe they're leaving out the most important aspects, and maybe they're telling you that you gain salvation through a means other than what Scripture truly says. And if you follow them, you might receive a different spirit than the true Spirit of God: You will have an experience, receive a real spirit, and maybe even see signs and wonders, but you won't have God's Spirit – you'll receive an evil spirit who deceives you.

Think about the implications of this warning. Imagine you were one of those people. Would you know that you were deceived? You would believe in Jesus, believe in the gospel, and receive a spirit. You would be fully convinced that you were a Christian. You would be confident in your salvation. Like the Israelites who persecuted the prophets, you would passionately stand up for what you thought was the truth. But you would believe in the wrong Jesus. You would trust the wrong gospel. And you would have an evil spirit.

What if that is who you currently are? What if you're believing in the wrong Jesus? What if you're trusting a man-made gospel? What if you received a false spirit?

How would you know?

False believers will be in our midst. They will disguise themselves as Christians – they will disguise themselves as sheep – but they will be wolves. They will pretend to be (and even think they are) servants of Jesus, but through their actions, they will serve the enemy.

Paul warned us about these people, saying, “Such men are not true apostles but are workers who lie. They change themselves to look like apostles of Christ. This does not surprise us. Even Satan changes himself to look like an angel of light. So it does not surprise us if Satan's servants also make themselves look like servants who work for what is right. But in the end they will be punished for what they do.”²³

Here is what many Christians fail to understand: Just because someone talks about God doesn't mean that person loves God. Just because someone reads the Bible and teaches from the Bible doesn't mean they're teaching what the Bible teaches. Just because someone preaches the name of Jesus doesn't mean they're preaching the truth about Jesus. Just because people claim to be Christians doesn't mean they are Christians.

We were warned. We were told false prophets would come. We were told false teachers would come. We were told they would be wolves in sheep's clothing. We were told they would disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. We were told they would change their appearance so they look like servants of Christ.

Their appearance means nothing! Even Satan himself can appear as an angel of light – so it shouldn't surprise us if his servants make themselves look like servants of Jesus!

You cannot determine what is true by outward appearance. You cannot trust men just because they call themselves Christians, preach the name of Jesus, say they love God, and teach something that can be backed up with Scripture.

You also shouldn't trust a teacher just because you become convinced that that person truly does love God and cares about Jesus. Maybe they do! That's not the measuring-stick we were given.

Christians today seem to think that Satan's servants will all know that they are servants of Satan. Therefore, they defend the teachers they love because they've decided that those teachers care about God, and they believe that everyone who cares about God is a true Christian. Christians today

²³ 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

act as if everything will be perfectly obvious. They miss the entire concept of what it means to be *deceived*.

Jesus said, “Can a blind person lead another blind person? No! Both of them will fall into a pit. A student is not better than the teacher, but the student who is fully trained will be like the teacher.”²⁴

Satan’s servants don’t have to know they’re his servants! They might be blind! If they’re blind, that means they can’t see – they don’t know who they are or who they’re serving. Jesus was talking about the Pharisees. The Pharisees thought they loved God! They thought they were serving God! They thought they were God’s chosen leaders! They did not at all think they were servants of Satan.

This is what is happening in the Church. We have the blind teaching the blind teaching the blind teaching the blind. The blind teachers don’t know that they’re servants of Satan. But, you don’t have to know you’re a servant of Satan in order to be a servant of Satan. Jesus also said, “Whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever does not gather with me scatters.”²⁵

You don’t have to know that you’re against Jesus to be against him; if you are not teaching the right thing, you are a servant of Satan – you’re doing his work, even if you truly think and believe that you’re working for the Lord. If you’re furthering a false gospel, teaching the wrong information, or in any other way furthering the work of the enemy, then you’re serving the enemy – whether you know it or not. Many false teachers will think they love God. They will have an appearance of godliness.²⁶ Their followers will defend them because they’re convinced that they love God and serve God. But they’re blind – they think they’re serving God, but they’re actually serving his enemy.

You must learn to use the measuring-stick given to us by God. You cannot make up your own standards and measure teachers by your own standards. Their appearance is nothing. We weren’t told to evaluate them by what they appear to care about, or if they appear to love God. Blind teachers will think they love God. They will appear to be passionate about him. They will appear to be Christians. They themselves will be convinced that they’re Christians. But they’re blind.

My heart breaks for people who are blind, but I’m not going to follow them. We cannot continue filling our heads with their useless “knowledge.”²⁷ We cannot continue allowing them to indoctrinate us with their false theologies, beliefs, and doctrines. We cannot choose to listen to them just because they genuinely think they’re serving God. If you follow someone who is deceived just because you think they have good intentions, you will follow that person into the pit. The road to Hell is paved with good intentions!

A blind guide will lead a blind follower into a pit. The implication is that the guide is blind – they don’t realize they’re serving Satan any more than their students do! But this doesn’t make them any less his servants. Their students don’t grow up to be like Jesus. Their students grow up to be as blind as they are.

That last part of what Jesus said – a student becoming like the teacher – is something many Christians reference. They say, “The student will become like the teacher! That means we can become like Jesus!”

And, that’s absolutely true!

But who is your teacher?

In this verse, Jesus wasn’t talking about himself as the Teacher (although he did use this same statement in other places to refer to himself and his disciples). Here, Jesus said “a student will

²⁴ Luke 6:39-40

²⁵ Matthew 12:30

²⁶ Ref. 2 Timothy 3:5

²⁷ Ref. 1 Timothy 6:20-21

become like the teacher” right after saying, “Can a blind person lead a blind person?” In other words, he was saying that if your teacher is a blind person, then at best you will become like your teacher and you will also be blind. You will not begin to see; you will stay blind. What’s worse – like the Pharisees, you will begin to think that you can see, when you’re still blind, and you might go and begin to teach others!²⁸

Jesus said about the Pharisees, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! You are hypocrites! You travel across land and sea to make one convert. When you make that convert, you make him twice the son of hell that you are.”²⁹

If you follow a blind teacher, become blind, and begin to preach “the gospel” to people, but you don’t preach the right thing, you are making converts who are more fit for hell than yourself. That is what Jesus said to the Pharisees, and that is the same thing happening in the Church today. Blind people are following blind people. Both will end up in the pit. You are not serving God if the gospel you’re evangelizing is a false gospel! You need to make sure that what you’re following is actually the truth, and that it’s from Scripture. You need to stop following men. If those men are blind, you will never arrive at the truth – even if you think you did. If those men are blind, you yourself will become a servant of Satan as you begin to evangelize and further a false gospel instead of the truth.

A student will become like his teacher. But if your teacher is not Jesus, then you will not become like Jesus.

You are not called to be a disciple of the Pope, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Wesley or anyone else. You are not called to be a disciple of your pastor, favorite preacher, favorite author, or favorite worship leader. You are called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. If you want to become like Jesus, you need to be *his* student. A student will become like the teacher – that’s what Jesus said.³⁰ But if your teacher is blind, then you will become like your blind teacher. You will not become like Jesus if he is not your Teacher.

Christians must begin to recognize this reality. They must begin to take this seriously. They must stop being so naïve! If you do not want to be deceived and led to destruction, you must take these warnings to heart. False teachers will deceive many. They will look like Christians, they will talk like Christians, they will read the Bible, quote the Bible, and teach from the Bible. They will appear to be servants of the light – but they will be the servants of Satan. If you follow them, you will also become a servant of Satan – whether you know it or not.

If you continue following them and listening to them, you won’t even know how to distinguish between what is true and what is not. You will see things in the Bible that aren’t really there. They will twist Scripture and convince you it says things it doesn’t really say. They will use Scripture to lead you into the pit.

Christian Pharisees

Christianity has ignored the warnings in Scripture. Christians haven’t taken these warnings to heart. They trust their teachers. They trust their pastors. They trust their leaders. They trust their denominations. They read their books. They listen to their sermons. They read their blogs and watch their videos.

Christians study the Bible in one hand, but they hold a theology book or a commentary in the other hand. They read Scripture, but they use the teaching of men to explain Scripture to them.

²⁸ Ref. Luke 11:52; John 9:40-41

²⁹ Matthew 23:15

³⁰ Ref. Matthew 10:25

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Very few Christians read Scripture and Scripture alone. They find Scripture too hard to understand by itself (because they’re convinced that it teaches a doctrine it doesn’t actually teach), so they turn to a commentary, a study Bible, a sermon, a devotional, or some other form of human teaching to have someone explain Scripture to them.

Do you know what Christians are doing when they do that? Do you know the historical example they are following?

They’re doing the exact same thing as the Pharisees!

The Pharisees had the Old Testament, but instead of just reading the Old Testament, they also read the writings of the rabbis (*rabbi* just means *teacher*). They used the teachings of the rabbis in order to understand Scripture – exactly like Christians do today! They had countless books and oral traditions to explain the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets. They used the teaching of men to understand Scripture. And, as a result, they actually did the opposite of what God had told them to do in Scripture!

Jesus said to the Pharisees, “And why do you violate God’s command for the sake of your traditions? God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say a person can tell his father or mother, ‘I have something I could use to help you, but I have given it to God already.’ You teach that person not to honor his father or his mother. You rejected the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. You are hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people show honor to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is worthless. The doctrines they teach are nothing but human rules.’”³¹

The Pharisees had their own writings and their own traditions, which they thought helped them understand the Bible. They thought their writings explained Scripture so they could follow it better. But Jesus said they were rejecting the word of God for the sake of their traditions. They were doing what men said – not what God said! They thought they needed someone to explain the Bible to them, so they turned to all their other books and traditions. But, in doing so, they stopped doing what Scripture directly taught. They rejected what God said, and they only did what men told them God had said.

Furthermore, as we saw earlier, this is also exactly what the Israelites did in the Old Testament when they were deceived by the false prophets. God said to them, “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. These wise teachers rejected the word of the Lord, so what wisdom is in them? They will be humiliated. They will be shocked and trapped.”³²

The Israelites thought they had wisdom because they had God’s word. They thought they understood what God wanted, and how he wanted them to live. But, instead of following Scripture – and Scripture alone – they turned to men to explain Scripture to them, and those men got it wrong. Those men were writing lies with their pens. They were false teachers.

The Israelites fell away from God when they started following teachers instead of Scripture. The Pharisees made the exact same mistake, following their own rabbis instead of Scripture. And, the New Testament warned us that the Church would make the same mistake yet again – reading and following teachers rather than Scripture, and Scripture alone.

Look at the Church today, and evaluate for yourself if this prophesy is fulfilled:

Today, we have Bibles with more commentary in them than actual Bible! We call them *study bibles*, and Christians use them to understand the Bible. Christians think they’re studying Scripture when they read the Bible and use a commentary to explain the Bible to them. Or, they read the Bible

³¹ Matthew 15:3-9

³² Jeremiah 8:8-9

and then listen to a sermon to explain what the Bible really means. Or, they read the Bible and then read some devotional that makes them feel good about what they read in the Bible. Or, they go to church and listen to an hour-long sermon that included ten sentences of Scripture – and they think the Word of God was preached!

Christians think they're wise because they have the teachings of the Lord! But they're getting all their "knowledge" from the pens of men who are claiming to explain Scripture!

What are you doing?

You are doing the same thing the Pharisees did! You are doing exactly what apostate Israel did! You think you're wise because you have the teachings of the Lord, but actually you're only reading the lies written by those who claim to be explaining Scripture. The apostles all warned you that the Church would be full of false teachers and false teaching – just like ancient Israel. But you're ignoring their warnings and turning to those teachers to explain Scripture to you anyway.

Christians have become Pharisees – following the wisdom of men instead of the wisdom of the Spirit. They fill their minds with Christian "rabbinical" writings. They learn doctrines, theology, human ideas, and man-made traditions, and they convince themselves that these ideas come from Scripture!

The Church has followed the same path taken by the Pharisees and Ancient Israel. The same ingredient that resulted in apostasy in the past was predicted to be found within the Church. As we can see, that ingredient is thriving in Christianity today. What does that tell us about the Church? What does that tell us about the apostasy that was predicted to come as a result?

The Israelites and the Pharisees are our example of what apostasy looks like. Shouldn't it scare us that we look just like them?

How have we allowed this to happen? With all the warnings in Scripture, how have we managed to let teachers take control? Despite all the warnings of Moses, the Israelites followed their false teachers to their own destruction. How has the Church done the same thing, even though we had more warnings than they did?

We have allowed this to happen because teachers have taught us that we need teachers. They tell us we need to rely on them to explain the Bible to us. They tell us that we can't understand the Bible without an expert or a scholar explaining the complex theology to us. Teachers tell us all the things that make us dependent on them! Meanwhile, they rely on their education, their worldly wisdom, and their own intellect.

But Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the people who are wise and learned. But you have revealed them to those who are like little children. Yes, Father, this is what you really wanted."³³

Jesus said the truth about the kingdom is purposefully hidden (by God!) from the smart, the intellectuals, and from the educated.

Think about that. God himself is hiding the truth from them. If God is hiding the truth from them, what hope do they have of ever finding the truth? And, if they are utterly incapable of finding the truth, then why are Christians so quick to believe that we need those educated men to explain the truth to us? Those educated men don't know the truth in the first place! They just *think* they do! They rely on their intelligence and education. They think their scholarly work allows them to find the truth, and equips them to teach other people. But it doesn't.

Christians have become Pharisees. The Pharisees were the educated scholars of their day. The scribes and Pharisees were the ones who "went to seminary" in a manner of speaking. They studied Scripture and told others what Scripture taught. Instead of following Scripture and Scripture

³³ Luke 10:21

alone, the people listened to the Pharisees. They trusted them. They believed what they taught. But the Pharisees were blind. The truth was hidden from them.

God hides the truth from those who search for the truth using worldly wisdom and education. He cannot be found through seminary, Bible colleges, higher education, or formal training. He hates the idea that people think they need formal training in order to know him.

Paul wrote, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent.’ Where is the wise person? Where is the educated person? Where is the orator of this world? God has made the wisdom of the world foolish. God wisely determined that the world would not know God through its own wisdom. So God was pleased to use the message that sounds foolish to save those who believe... Brothers and sisters, look at what you were when God called you. Not many of you were wise in the way the world judges wisdom. Not many of you had great influence. Not many of you came from important families. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and he chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose what the world thinks is unimportant and what the world looks down on and thinks is nothing in order to destroy what the world thinks is important. God did this so that no one can brag in his presence. Because of God you are united with Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God.”³⁴

The wisdom of the world is foolish. God doesn’t use the education of this world. He doesn’t rely on scholars and seminaries. He determined, just as Jesus said, that people would not know him through the wisdom and education of this world. God uses what people think is unimportant. God uses what people look down on.

Education, formal training, seminary classes, and scholarly work play no role whatsoever in whether someone will know the truth. If we want to learn the truth, we must stop turning to men who are incapable of knowing the truth. We must begin to do what Jesus said – we must make ourselves like little children. If we make ourselves like little children, God himself will reveal the truth to us.

But instead of learning from God, Christians have become convinced that they need to learn from men. Educated men convinced everyone else that they know what they’re talking about, and that everyone should follow them. They convinced people that we need them or we won’t understand the Bible. They convinced people that we need to follow their methods of reading the Bible to understand it (it’s called *hermeneutics*).

The blind teachers have convinced the blind students to follow them. Just like the Israelites, and just like the Pharisees, the blind are leading the blind into a pit. The predictions of Jesus and the apostles were accurate.

Christians think they need to read doctrine books. They think they need to learn theology. They think they need to fill their minds with the ideas of educated scholars. They think those men know God better than others.

The Protestant Reformation brought man’s teaching to the center of the Christian life. The reason the sermon is the focal point of the Church service is because Martin Luther insisted that Christians needed to learn from formally educated, scholarly men. Once again, what we do is a direct result of what we believe. It’s not enough to just change the structure – it is crucial to address the beliefs behind the structure. Reading a doctrine book alongside the Bible is just as corrupting as having the entire congregation passively sit and listen to one man speak.

Christians have followed the example of the Israelites and the Pharisees instead of the example of Jesus and the apostles. The Church was founded by uneducated, common men. They

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:19-21, 26-30

didn't have formal training. They weren't puffed up on doctrine, theology, and complex terminology.

They knew God. That was all that was required.

You Have Only One Teacher

As Christians, we live under the promised New Covenant. When God created the nation of Israel, he made a covenant with them. A *covenant* is essentially a fancy word for an *agreement*. God made an agreement with the Israelites that he would be their God, and they would be his people as long as they obeyed him. But, if they didn't obey him, he would reject them and drive them out of their own country. Hundreds of years later, that is exactly what happened.

But, when it happened, God promised a new covenant. He said, “‘Look, the time is coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt. I was a husband to them, but they broke my covenant,’ says the Lord. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel at the time,’ says the Lord: ‘I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. People will no longer have to teach their neighbors and brothers to know the Lord, because all people will know me, from the least to the most important,’ says the Lord. ‘I will forgive them for their iniquities, and I will not remember their sins anymore.’”³⁵

As Hebrews explained,³⁶ this promise was fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus established the New Covenant through his death and resurrection.³⁷

Today, most Christians think of the New Covenant as the promise of forgiveness through Jesus. But, look again at what God had promised. Forgiveness was included, yes. But it was only the last line. The majority of the promised New Covenant was a promise that God would put his laws in our minds and write them on our hearts, and that no one would have to teach others to know the Lord, because all his people would know him.

Part of the very fabric of the New Covenant is that we don't need teachers! Israel had fallen away from God because they followed false teachers. So, God promised a new covenant – a covenant in which no one would need teachers in the first place!

Jesus confirmed this. He said, “‘But you must not be called Teacher, because you have only one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters together.’”³⁸

No Christian should be called “Teacher.” There is only one Teacher – Jesus. In the New Covenant, there is no longer any need for anyone else to teach you. In the New Covenant, you have one Teacher – the One who reveals the truth to those who become like little children. In the New Covenant, Christians do not need to be taught by other men – they have the Spirit, and the Spirit teaches us everything.

This means you have no need to read doctrine books. You have no need to read theology books. You have no need to read devotionals. You have no need to read any Christian book. You have no need to listen to sermons. You have no need to follow Christian blogs. You have no need to fill your mind with the information spewing out of the mouths of Christian teachers, preachers, writers, theologians, and other leaders.

Like the apostles, you can know God. You can know the truth – even though you are a common, uneducated person. You have no need for a man to teach you anything.

³⁵ Jeremiah 31:31-34

³⁶ Ref. Hebrews 8:7-10:23

³⁷ Ref. Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25

³⁸ Matthew 23:8

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John wrote about false teachers who would rise up in the Church. He said, “I have written these things about those people who are trying to lead you the wrong way. *As for you, the anointing that you received from him remains in you, so you do not need any other teacher. His anointing teaches you about everything, and it is true, not false...*”³⁹

In the New Testament, *the anointing* is the Holy Spirit. John was telling us that we have no need for anyone to teach us. The Holy Spirit is enough. We don’t need any man. We don’t need to listen to sermons. We don’t need to read books. We don’t need to watch videos. The Holy Spirit alone – without help from anyone else – will teach us everything.

In the context of this verse, John was warning Christians about false teachers. He was saying that the only way to make sure you are not led astray by false teachers is to not follow any men in the first place! The only way to make sure you are not deceived by the deceivers is to not listen to them! You have no need for any other teacher! The Anointing teaches you about everything!

Jesus said the same thing. He said, “But the Helper will teach you everything and will remind you of all that I told you. This Helper is the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name.”⁴⁰ He also said, “But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you into all truth.”⁴¹

Christians can avoid being deceived simply by not following men. The Holy Spirit will teach *everything* you need to know – not *some* of what you need to know. The Holy Spirit will lead you into *all* truth – not *some* truth.

When John warned us about false teachers, his solution was not to pick the teachers who teach the “right things.” His solution was not to listen to teachers, all the while remembering that the Holy Spirit is really the one teaching you through those teachers. His solution was not to keep reading books and listening to sermons until you’re able to distinguish between true teachers and false teachers.

No – his solution was to recognize that you have no need to listen to them in the first place! If you want to guarantee that you’re not led into total and utter destruction by false teachers, then just stop listening to them! That’s it! That’s all you have to do! Let the Holy Spirit be your Teacher!

Similarly, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he wrote three-and-a-half chapters about how they should stop following teachers.⁴² Most Christians read this section and miss his whole point. They miss his real instruction. His *point* was summed up in his concluding statement: “Brothers and sisters, I have used Apollos and myself as examples so you could learn through us the meaning of the saying, ‘Follow only what is written in the Scriptures.’ Then you will not be more proud of one person than another.”⁴³

Paul and Apollos were both well-known Christian teachers in the first century. They knew each other, and they both taught the truth. Paul didn’t have a problem with what Apollos taught, but he wanted the Corinthians to stop following men. He wanted them to follow Scripture and Scripture alone. He wanted them to be taught by the Spirit.⁴⁴ He wanted them to stop valuing what this world values. He wanted them to stop thinking they could learn the truth from any man.

Christians must stop turning to books, videos, sermons, blogs, music, or any other form of human teaching. If Christians want to avoid the apostasy that Jesus and the apostles predicted, the only way to do that is to avoid the false teachers they predicted. And, the only way to avoid those false teachers is to simply stop following *any* teacher.

³⁹ 1 John 2:26-27, emphasis added

⁴⁰ John 14:26

⁴¹ John 16:13

⁴² Ref. 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:6

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 4:6

⁴⁴ Ref. 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

You do not need to listen to sermons. You do not need to read Christian books. You do not need to read Christian blogs. You do not need to watch Christian videos. You do not need to listen to Christian podcasts. You do not need any man to teach you. The Holy Spirit is enough. The whole idea of modern Christian teaching is man-made. It was created by men who wanted followers.

Obviously, this brings up the question: Why does the Bible say that God gives teachers to the Church?⁴⁵

That's a great question! We will look at that later in this series. But, suffice it to say for now, God gives teachers to the Church for a completely different purpose than how Christians use teachers today.

Look at the Fruit

Before concluding this video, I'd like to look at one final thing Jesus and the apostles taught and compare it to a few noteworthy examples from Church history.

When Jesus warned us about false teachers, he said, "Be careful of false prophets. They come to you disguised like sheep, but underneath they are ferocious wolves. You will know these people by their fruit. Grapes don't come from thornbushes, and figs don't come from thorny weeds. In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. Every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. In the same way, you will know these false prophets by their fruit."⁴⁶

According to Jesus, it is possible to identify false prophets by their fruit. Why? Because good trees will only produce good fruit, and bad trees will only produce bad fruit.

John said something similar. He said, "Anyone who claims, 'I am in the light,' but hates a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light 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."⁴⁷

He also said, "Dear children, do not let anyone deceive you. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as Christ is righteous. Anyone who continues to sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning. The Son of God came for this purpose: to destroy the devil's work. All who are God's children do not continue sinning, because God's seed remains in them. They are not able to go on sinning, because they have become children of God. In this way it is apparent who God's children are and who the devil's children are: Those who do not do what is right are not God's children, and those who do not love their brothers and sisters are not God's children."⁴⁸

Jesus and John were both saying the same thing: It is possible to identify a tree by its fruit. If someone doesn't love the brothers and sisters, then they have never known Christ, and they don't have life. Good trees will bear only good fruit – they will love others; and bad trees will bear only bad fruit – they will not love others. John also explained what real love is (we will look at this in more detail in a later video).

Good trees will not have bad fruit, which means, if you can see *some* bad fruit, the whole tree must be bad. True believers will make all their decisions around what is good for others. They will think about others, and not themselves. If we see someone who is not doing that, then we can know

⁴⁵ Ref. Ephesians 4:11-12 (among others)

⁴⁶ Matthew 7:15-20

⁴⁷ 1 John 2:9-11

⁴⁸ 1 John 3:7-10

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that that person doesn’t know Christ – that person is bearing bad fruit. According to John, that person is not a child of God, but is a child of the devil. They aren’t true Christians.

If a tree has *any* bad fruit, it is a bad tree. And, if it is a bad tree, it will not have *any* good fruit. That means, if you see a tree that has some bad fruit and some good fruit, it simply means you’re wrong about something – you think you’re seeing good fruit where there is none, or you think you’re seeing bad fruit where there is none. There are no other options unless Jesus was a liar.

Therefore, if you see a bad tree, you shouldn’t go up to that tree and start picking fruit from it and eating it. You can’t get any good fruit from a bad tree!

So, keeping that in mind, let’s look at the Protestant Reformation. I grew up in the Protestant Church, I considered myself a Protestant for almost three decades, and my experience has been, almost exclusively, Protestantism. Therefore, I will focus my attention throughout this series on Protestantism. However, if you are Catholic, Orthodox, or any other sect of Christianity, I encourage you to continue on, as I believe there is a lot of stuff in this series for you as well.

The Protestant Church is built on the foundational work of the Reformers. Every Protestant Church (including Baptists, Methodists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Seventh-Day Adventists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and many others...) is founded on, and centered around the teaching of the Reformers.

Martin Luther⁴⁹ was the original founder of the Protestant Reformation. Nearly everyone has heard of him – Christians talk about him, quote him, make movies about him, and teach what he taught. He is seen as an all-around good guy. He saw the corruption of the Catholic Church in the early sixteenth century, he knew what they were doing was wrong, and he began a movement away from them. He taught people the *priesthood of all believers*. This essentially meant that everyone can participate. This meant that everyone has access to God. This meant that we don’t need any man to represent us before God anymore. He wanted to move away from the priests in the Catholic Church. He wanted every Christian to feel free to pray to God directly. He wanted every Christian to feel free to read Scripture themselves. He wanted every Christian to know they could receive forgiveness from God directly – they didn’t have to go through a priest.

But there was a problem. Martin Luther said he believed in the priesthood of all believers, but when it really came down to it, he proved by his actions that he didn’t hold to his own theology. When push came to shove, the Protestant Reformation ended up with the same thing the Catholic Church had – a priesthood of selected individuals who ruled over the laity (*laity* means *the people*).

The Anabaptists, on the other hand, took Martin Luther’s teaching to its own logical conclusion. They believed every believer should be able to contribute to the Church meeting. They believed anyone should be able to stand up and speak – not just the pastor or preacher. Furthermore, if someone stood up to speak, then the first person should sit down and stop speaking.

Imagine what it would be like if your pastor was giving a message on Sunday and someone else in the congregation stood up, began speaking, and your pastor sat down and let that other person speak instead. In the church I grew up in, if this happened, the second person would be escorted out of the building by a security team while the pastor continued his sermon.

But the Anabaptists didn’t do what Christians do today. They believed the first person should sit down and stop speaking – and the second person should be allowed to continue. They believed this because it is, in fact, what Paul directly taught.⁵⁰ It is entirely biblical. But you might

⁴⁹ Not to be confused with Martin Luther King Jr. – that was someone else. I know some people who didn’t know this, so I’m just clarifying – they’re two different people.

⁵⁰ Ref. 1 Corinthians 14:26-31

notice that the Protestant Church, for the most part, doesn't do this. That's because Martin Luther didn't like it. He wanted to control who was able to teach so people would only teach what lined up with his theology.

What did Martin Luther do?

He said their belief was “from the pit of hell,” and he declared that anyone who practiced this should be put to death. As stated by Peter Hoover, “Martin Luther and his colleagues met at Speyer on the Rhein in 1529... At that time they passed a resolution: ‘Every Anabaptist, both male and female, shall be put to death by fire, sword, or in some other way’”⁵¹

Martin Luther worshiped the Sunday sermon. He worshiped teaching. It was the focal-point of everything he built on. He wanted everyone to follow men. He wanted everyone to learn from teachers.

As a result of Martin Luther's declaration, one hundred and sixteen laws were put in place in Germany – where Martin Luther was influential, and where he lived – making Anabaptism a crime worthy of death.⁵² It was a capital offense. As a result of his stance (and the stance of other prominent Reformers), thousands of Anabaptist believers were tortured and put to death.

More than this, Martin Luther wrote *On The Jews And Their Lies*. In this treatise, “he argues that Jewish synagogues and schools be set on fire, their prayer books destroyed, rabbis forbidden to preach, homes burned, and property and money confiscated. They should be shown no mercy or kindness, afforded no legal protection, and ‘these poisonous envenomed worms’ should be drafted into forced labor or expelled for all time. He also seems to advocate their murder, writing ‘[W]e are at fault in not slaying them.’”⁵³

This book had a significant impact in Germany several centuries later, when it was used as one of the primary influences to support the Holocaust. His book was often found at Nazi rallies, it was referenced throughout the short and tragic time of Nazi Germany, and was cited on numerous occasions during the Nuremberg Trials after World War Two had ended.⁵⁴

The fruit born by Martin Luther is that people were killed as a direct result of his teaching. The fruit born by Martin Luther was that if anyone opposed his views or held a different view, that person should be put to death. The fruit born by Martin Luther was murder, hatred, and violence.

Jesus said, “Love your enemies.”⁵⁵ Martin Luther said, “Burn their schools, burn their homes, confiscate their money, and force them into hard labor.”

Jesus said, “Show mercy, just as your Father shows mercy.”⁵⁶ Martin Luther said, “they should be shown no mercy or kindness.”

Jesus said that those who want to kill others are children of the devil – even if they think they are children of God.⁵⁷ The devil is a murderer, and only his children kill those who oppose them. Martin Luther responded to opposition the same way the Pharisees did – with threats, persecution, violence, and murder.

These are just a few examples of the fruit that came from the life of Martin Luther. Yet he is still considered by many Christians as the greatest theologian who has ever lived. The Protestant Church still, to this day, stands on the teaching of Martin Luther. His gospel is the gospel preached

⁵¹ Peter Hoover, *Secret of the Strength*, Benchmark Press, 1999, p. 198

⁵² Ref. Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices*, BarnaBooks, 2002, 2012, p.129

⁵³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_the_Jews_and_Their_Lies, 2020

⁵⁴ Ref. Christopher J Probst, *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany*, 2012

⁵⁵ Luke 6:27

⁵⁶ Luke 6:36

⁵⁷ Ref. John 8:31-47

in almost every Church across the Western world. People still believe that he taught the correct path to salvation. They eat the fruit from his tree.

Let’s look at another Reformer – John Calvin. Many people follow John Calvin. I grew up in a Church that followed John Calvin. He was quoted. He was admired. He was held as someone that we should follow. He was considered a hero of the Christian faith.

But did John Calvin bear good fruit or bad fruit?

John Calvin held a prominent position in the town of Geneva. He had authority. He had power. He used his position to maintain authority and power.

When anyone came along, questioning what Calvin taught, he had them put to death. He requested beheadings. He had people burned at the stake. He not only killed them, he praised God when his theological opponents were tortured and given slow, painful deaths.

Jacques Gruet, who disagreed with Calvin, placed a letter in Calvin’s pulpit. The letter accused Calvin of being a hypocrite. Calvin’s response? He had Jacques Gruet arrested, tortured every day for a month, and beheaded on July 26, 1547. He then searched out and found Gruet’s own book and burned it. He also burned down Gruet’s house while his wife was thrown outside to watch.^{58 59}

Calvin had a longtime acquaintance who had stood by his side against the authority of the Catholic Church. This man, Michael Servetus, didn’t even oppose Calvin. All he did was return a copy of Calvin’s book with some critical comments in the margins. He meant no harm to Calvin, and he fully intended to remain Calvin’s friend. But Calvin was outraged.

Servetus attempted to visit Calvin again – believing they were still friends. Calvin had him arrested and charged with heresy. He was sentenced to death. On October 27, 1553, Michael Servetus was burned at the stake. They used green wood for the fire so it would kill him slowly. He begged for mercy and prayed to Jesus as he slowly died at the hands of his longtime friend.^{60 61}

Calvin led the Church in the small town of Geneva. During the time of Calvin’s reign, fifty-eight people were executed for various reasons such as heresy, blasphemy, witchcraft, or adultery. Another seventy-six people were banished from the town. Countless others suffered terrible punishments for their “crimes” – women imprisoned for dancing, men imprisoned for laughing during Calvin’s sermon, and a child was whipped for accusing his mother of being a thief.⁶²

As many of his followers are quick to point out, Calvin was not the man who made the final decision about who would live, or who would die. But, as the spiritual leader in a city that enforced his ideology, he had a strong influence on the magistrates, his opinion carried weight, and he used his authority to influence decisions. Furthermore, he openly condoned and approved of the executions.

He wrote about Michael Servetus seven years before the incident, saying, “If he comes [to Geneva], I shall never let him go out alive if my authority has weight.”⁶³

Obviously, Calvin’s authority carried some sort of weight.

When Servetus was arrested, he wrote, “I hope that sentence of death will at least be passed upon him.”⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Ref. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc8.iv.xiii.xii.html>

⁵⁹ Ref. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, II, p. 502

⁶⁰ Ref. <http://www.reenactingtheway.com/blog/john-calvin-had-people-killed-and-bad-bible-interpretation-justified-it>

⁶¹ Ref. <https://www.evangelicaloutreach.org/michael-servetus.htm>

⁶² Ref. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: Modern Christianity; the Swiss Reformation*, 2d ed., rev, 1898, pp. 490-493

⁶³ John Calvin, in a letter to Farel, Feb. 13, 1546

⁶⁴ John Calvin, in a letter to Farel, Aug. 20, 1553

And after Servetus was killed, Calvin wrote, “Honour, glory, and riches shall be the reward of your pains; but above all, do not fail to rid the country of those scoundrels, who stir up the people to revolt against us. Such monsters should be exterminated, as I have exterminated Michael Servetus the Spaniard.”⁶⁵

John Calvin wrote about himself, saying, “I have exterminated Michael Servetus...” So, clearly, that was his own opinion. His fans today say, “John Calvin didn’t kill him.” But Calvin himself said he did!

John Calvin used his influence to have people killed, he celebrated their deaths, and he never repented of his actions until the day he died. He often wrote about their deaths, continuing to argue that he did the right thing.

This is the man many Christians still follow to this day. And Christians are content to just say, “Well, he was wrong about a couple of things.”

No.

He hated the brothers and sisters. He hated his enemies. He hated the lost.

The apostle John said, “Anyone who claims, ‘I am in the light,’ but hates a brother or sister, is still in the darkness.”⁶⁶ “In this way it is evident who God’s children are and who the devil’s children are: Those who do not do what is right are not God’s children, and those who do not love their brothers and sisters are not God’s children.”⁶⁷ “Everyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderers have eternal life in them.”⁶⁸

According to Scripture, if John Calvin didn’t love others, then he never knew Christ. He was a murderer – both for hating others, and for actually killing others. As he himself said, “I have exterminated Michael Servetus.” That’s his own acknowledgment! It doesn’t matter what excuses modern Christians use to defend his actions. It doesn’t matter how much they say that he wasn’t the one in charge. By his own admission, he participated in Michael Servetus’ death! And, as Jesus said, “...by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”⁶⁹

John Calvin was a murderer. And as John said, “no murderers have eternal life in them.” He was not a child of God, he was a child of the devil. He was a murderer. He was a servant of Satan. He bore bad fruit – ample bad fruit. According to Jesus, that means he is going to be cut down and thrown into the fire. He is a blind guide, and if you follow him you will also fall into the pit.

But the Church today forgets about the victims. They turn a blind eye to those killed at the hands of the Reformers. They’re too busy following and learning “biblical truths” from the murderers. They happily pick rotten fruit from a bad tree and eat it without noticing how sick the tree is.

Why do we follow men without first examining their fruit?

Sadly, many Christians today even know about this fruit, but they still defend Martin Luther and John Calvin. I’ve heard Christians say things like, “this is how things were handled in their time. It’s easy to look back and criticize and think they should have known better. They were men of their time.” This is the predominant response from people who want to defend these men. But it’s an empty response!

Jesus and the apostles lived at a time when people were often stripped naked and crucified in the streets. They lived at a time when heretics were stoned to death. They lived at a time when the Jewish mindset was to revolt against Rome – which led to a massive war and millions dead. But they

⁶⁵ John Calvin, in a letter to Marquis Paet, 1561

⁶⁶ 1 John 2:9

⁶⁷ 1 John 3:10

⁶⁸ 1 John 3:15

⁶⁹ Matthew 12:37

weren’t like the people of their time because they were filled with the Holy Spirit! They were different! They were changed! True Christians don’t respond like the people of their time. True Christians are transformed by the Spirit – which is why Jesus said a tree can be identified by its fruit.

Christians also say, “They had some flaws. But they did a lot of good, too. They just didn’t get everything right.”

In other words, Christians think Jesus is a liar.

Jesus said if a tree has *any* bad fruit, then the whole tree is bad, and it is utterly incapable of bearing good fruit. But Christians today say that it’s okay to follow a man who bore a lot of bad fruit because he bore some good fruit, too. They reject the word of God for the sake of their own traditions.⁷⁰

Someone is lying. Either bad trees can bear some good fruit and good trees can bear some bad fruit and Jesus is a liar – or modern Christians are foolishly defending men and wholeheartedly following men who were actually servants of Satan – wolves in sheep’s clothing – two of the many false teachers who lead people into destruction that Jesus and the apostles all warned us about.

If you are following either of these men and view them as great Christian teachers who maybe had a few things wrong – Jesus would say, “No. A bad tree cannot have good fruit.” If you still believe and accept the gospel created by Martin Luther, then you still believe it’s possible to find some good fruit on a bad tree – or, that it’s possible for a good tree to produce some bad fruit. If you believe these men and think you can learn from these men, then you prove through your actions that you trust and believe in them more than you trust and believe in Jesus. Your faith is in Martin Luther or John Calvin – not in Jesus.

These two men are just two examples of many.

Do not pick fruit off a rotten tree. And, if the fruit is rotten, then you can know the whole tree is rotten. Remember what Jesus said. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. Every person following a blind guide will also fall into the pit.

Are you eating from a rotten tree?

The Protestant Reformation changed things about the Church, but they did not restore Christianity. That’s why the Church today still does not look like the Book of Acts. They didn’t restore Christianity – they reformed Catholicism. They made it look a little different, but they held onto Pagan practices, they held onto false teaching, they continued persecuting those who opposed them, and they created their own new false teaching.

Do not follow men.

You have one Teacher, and that is all you need. Put down your theology books. Put down those sermons. Put down your favorite preacher. Pick up your Bible. Ask the Lord to tear down everything that’s bad, and to teach you.

If you ask, you will receive. If you seek, you will find. If you knock, the door will be opened.⁷¹ Keep on asking. Keep on searching. Keep on knocking. Never be ashamed of your questions. Never stop asking. Never stop searching until you arrive at a knowledge of the truth.⁷² Never stop asking until you have matured into the image of Jesus. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will teach you everything. Do you realize how amazing that is? That is a promise for you to hold onto. So, hold onto that, and keep asking.

You need to follow Scripture, and Scripture alone.

⁷⁰ Ref. Matthew 15:3,6

⁷¹ Ref. Matthew 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-13

⁷² Ref. 2 Timothy 3:7

If you keep searching, you will find the truth. If you keep knocking, the door will be opened to you. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask.⁷³ Too many Christians read the Bible and don't ask questions. They think it's doubting to ask questions. They think it's doubting the faith. You're not doubting the faith. You're doubting the teachings of men. When those teachings of men do not match up with what you read in the Bible, it causes doubt. It causes questions. They want you to push these questions away because they don't want you to question their teaching.

Don't push it away.

When you ask questions and you really want the truth, the Bible will stay firm. Your questions are not going to shake God's foundation! Ask away. All it will do is lead you further into the truth. If you push those questions away, you're proving that you think your questions might break something in Scripture – you're proving that you're afraid of what the answer might be because it might make you realize the Bible isn't real.

That won't happen! Don't doubt that the Bible is true – doubt that the teaching you have heard is true. The reason questions come up is because the Bible doesn't match our lives. We see things in the Bible that we can't explain or relate to. The only reason it doesn't match your life is because your life is wrong and your theology is wrong. Your doctrines are wrong.

So question those.

As Christians, we have no need for a man to teach us. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher. He will lead us into all truth. So, if you're reading the Bible, but you're not understanding much of it, it means the Spirit isn't teaching you. It probably means you're reading the Bible through the lens of what you've been told it means, holding onto a belief that isn't true, and trying to understand how the Bible says something it doesn't actually say!

The answer is not to just turn to a man to explain it to you. The answer is to figure out why the Spirit isn't teaching you. So, figure out how to solve that problem. Let go of all the teaching you've been holding onto, and ask the Spirit to begin to teach you.

Jesus gave us a promise that the Holy Spirit will teach us *everything* – not *some* things. He didn't say you're going to be taught some things by the Holy Spirit and some things by teachers. He didn't say you're going to learn some things, but you're always going to be wrong about other things. He said the Spirit will teach you everything.

Hold onto that promise, and start asking questions. Start believing in your Teacher.

We cannot only question the rituals and structure of the Church today. We cannot meet in homes, but still read theology books. We cannot have participatory meetings, but still listen to sermons in our free time and read Christian books in the morning. We must question what we've been taught. We must second-guess our own beliefs, theologies, and doctrines. We must re-evaluate everything we thought we knew. False teachers have come and have filled our minds with lies. Those lies are the basis for why Christians do things the way they do them.

The reason we do what we do is because men have told us to do it that way – and those same men have taught us our theology and our doctrine. They were the ones who told us how to be saved. They were wrong about the rituals. They were wrong about the traditions. And they are wrong about the theology.

We cannot tear down part of a house and start rebuilding if the foundation is still bad. We cannot try to fix a building that was built by false teachers. We must tear down the entire house and start from scratch. We must start from the ground up. If we don't tear down everything, we will still build a bad house.

⁷³ Ref. Luke 11:5-13

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We need to go back to Scripture – and Scripture alone – to determine what it means to believe in Jesus, what it means to obey him, and what it means to be a Christian. We need to set aside all other books, sermons, videos, blogs, podcasts, doctrines, and anything else given to us by men – whether we trust those men or not. We need to start from scratch. What did Jesus teach? What did the apostles teach? What was Christianity to the first Christians? What did they believe? And what did they do?

As we go through this series, we’re going to address many different things the Church has wrong. But we must understand *why* the Church is wrong. The Church is wrong because instead of following Scripture and Scripture alone, we’ve followed teachers. We have done the exact same thing Jesus and the apostles warned us not to do.

It is the biggest warning in the New Testament, and the Church ignores it. The Bible warns us – time and time again – that if we get this wrong, we will be deceived, and the result will be that we are led to destruction.

It’s time to change.