

# The Life of the First Christians

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## ⚓ 1 Our reason for writing about the first Christians

Our intention in writing about the first Christians is not merely to describe their way of life and view of things. The aim of this text is to invite the readers to think about **why** they lived as they did.

Many people today share the opinion that we can no longer live as the first Christians did because the circumstances we live in are different, or that it was only possible for the first Christians to share their lives with each other so intensively because of their initial enthusiasm. We would like to show that the life of the first Christians was a continuation of what the disciples saw in their master's life. They understood that Jesus' devotion is the archetype of true service for God and that following him means just this: to be ready to commit our whole lives to God, to our brothers and to the growth of his kingdom just as Jesus did, regardless of what it might mean specifically for our lives. This is how it was then, and it cannot be any different today.

The Sunday and hobby “Christianity” of today is not a necessary result of changes in society. Rather, it is an expression of people's unwillingness to walk on the narrow path of following Jesus, even though they somehow desire salvation. Even during Jesus' time, there were people with this attitude, whom he warned:

*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great. (Luke 6:46-49)*

## 2 “They left everything to follow him” – the time the disciples were with Jesus

When John the Baptist started to baptize his fellow-countrymen and call them to repentance, preparing them for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus had not begun his public ministry yet. John attracted the attention of many Jews, especially those who had high hopes that God would not wait much longer in

sending the promised saviour. Some of these Jews later became Jesus' most trusted friends.

From the time of Jesus' baptism, John the Baptist began to clearly testify that Jesus was the servant of God who would redeem Israel. As the people came to him, he pointed them to Jesus. The focus of the Messianic movement thus shifted from John to Jesus.

Jesus chose twelve men from among those who came to listen to him and accompanied him from time to time, with the aim that they remain with him constantly.[1] He explained many things more exactly to them. They are known as the apostles. They got to know him most deeply, and were taught and formed by him in order to be able to later bear the central responsibility of building the new nation of God, the church.

When Jesus was asked what the most important commandment is, he replied:

The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.(*Mark 12:29-31*)

On the last evening they spent together, Jesus gave his disciples the new commandment to love each other as he loved them and gave them his own example to show what it means to fulfil the greatest commandment [2] . At this point, his disciples had not yet grasped the full extent of this love, since the greatest proof for it—the step to submit to the unjust, cruel death on the cross—had not yet taken place. Through their daily fellowship with him, however, they had already understood many things:

- His example in the uncertain and irregular life as they travelled with him taught them deep and unconditional trust in God. Jesus knew the Father as the one who **is** love in his very being, and who will provide him with everything he needs.
- They also witnessed his prayer life and closeness with the Father, from whom he drew the strength for everything he did. In this way he was able to resist every temptation to receive acknowledgement and honour from people, and was filled with and led by complete devotion to God.[3] This must have impressed his disciples, and they asked him to teach them to pray.[4]
- His disciples must have also taken special notice of his empathetic and impartial care for the weak, the despised and the outcasts, those who were caught in sin and who he was able to show the way out to. [5]
- He was available every day of his public ministry in tireless devotion to the people who were like sheep without a shepherd. His shepherd-like love was so great that he was willing to put aside his own needs in order to give food to the spiritually hungry. It is reported that sometimes so many came that there was not even time to eat. [6]
- The apostles also knew his fearless clarity in the disputes with the self-righteous Pharisees. Jesus saw that the only thing that could help them out of eternal condemnation is to expose their hypocrisy.
- He also taught his disciples to love their enemies, not even to respond to hostility with hate or grudge, but to put them to shame with a humble and loving attitude.[7]
- Finally, his disciples also experienced how he stood up for the truth he preached without compromise. He chose rather to die than to retract anything he said or to flee from his enemies, which would have undermined his own credibility and that of his message. He knew that the salvation of mankind depended on it. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.[8]
- In all this, they saw his selfless attitude: he was ready to give and serve without expecting any reward or gratitude from the people. [9]

### **3 “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” - from Golgatha to Pentecost**

Even though Jesus had prepared his disciples for the fact that he would die and rise from the dead<sup>[10]</sup>, his death was nevertheless a catastrophe for them which seemed to have taken away all hope. Risen from the dead, he appeared to them on the third day. The following weeks with the resurrected Jesus were again a time of intensive rethinking. They learned to see everything in a new light. It became very clear to them that the Messiah is not the one who would set up an earthly kingdom of peace and destroy all the wicked. The kingdom of God bears its good fruit in the midst of the weeds of this world. The disciples were commissioned to go to the ends of the earth with the message of Jesus and preach the grace of God everywhere—the God who became man out of love. In Jesus God himself came into the world. Through his devotion he wanted to lead mankind to repentance from their rejection and apathy towards their loving Creator, and to a life of love for God and their neighbours—this is the way of salvation. From then on the disciples of Jesus were to give their lives for this very purpose.

At Pentecost the disciples received the Holy Spirit. This was the decisive impetus for them to go out to preach. The Spirit of God helped them overcome all fear and gave them words that touched people's hearts. Not few among the Jews who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost believed the testimony of the disciples concerning the resurrection of Jesus and the fact that he is the Messiah sent by God. This was the beginning of church history.

### **4 “Brothers, what shall we do?” - the emergence of the church and church life**

We find the following text in Acts 2:32-47. It contains the last part of Peter's sermon, delivered to the Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), and the reaction of those who believed:

“... This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”’ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the

temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Just like Jesus [11], Peter began with a call to repentance. The condition for a new life as God's child is to turn away from the old life ruled by sin. Whoever wants to belong to God has to come to the light along with sins which separate him from God and other people.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:5-7)

Man can only approach the holy God with a sincere heart. If one opens up his sins before God, God will "cover" them [12]. God will forgive him and create a new man out of this person who allows God's Spirit to lead him. God's Spirit will lead those who repented to a life of love. **The disciples of Jesus had learned from their master that love means devoting their whole lives; this devotion was what shaped the believers of the early church.** The love that God pours out into the hearts of his children [13] compels them not to live for themselves any longer. Paul puts it this way:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (NIV))

The first Christians did not want to live for themselves, just like Jesus. They fought to become free of everything that could hinder them from loving this way—free from being bound or attached to their houses, fields, family members, future plans ... [14] They were ready to let go of everything that would hinder them in serving God and helping people receive salvation. They knew from Jesus on the one hand that this service would not be possible any other way, and on the other hand, that there is a promise that comes along with it:

Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life." (Mark 10:28-30)

Their readiness to deny themselves [15] and give up their self-determined lives made them free for things of God's kingdom. They spent their time daily in the temple, where they could speak with many of their countrymen and give testimony about Jesus the Messiah. They gathered in their houses for daily fellowship. In their small assemblies, no one remained anonymous. There were no liturgies or programmes, which one could attend without any commitment. They practically experienced how they became brothers, sisters, parents and children to one another, even if they had previously been distanced, alienated or even hostile towards each other. The church was open for everyone: the rich and the poor, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, young and old. Their life of fellowship was grounded on what the apostles taught about Jesus' life and commandments as well as God's being and will. Just as Jesus served the people, they

too served, encouraged, admonished, comforted and corrected each other. They spent as much time with each other as they could, and therefore knew each other very well. They knew where their brothers and sisters needed help. In shallow and short-lived relationships, real love cannot be put into practice because it means that you do not open up your private sphere to others. The Christians in that time shared their joys and pain, confessed their weaknesses and sins to one another<sup>[16]</sup>, and helped each other in the fight of faith. All things were done out of the desire to support one another in living holy lives pleasing to God, so that they would all reach the aim of their faith: the eternal joy in the presence of God. Hebrews 3:12-14 clearly shows how important daily brotherly encouragement is:

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But *exhort one another every day*, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Through their love, devotion and unity they became the light that Jesus spoke of<sup>[17]</sup>, which impressed the people around them. Yet no-one dared to join them unless they had the same desire to live a holy life.<sup>[18]</sup>

They were deeply united through their common faith in Jesus as the saviour and in the truth of his word. This, however, also meant that the union was destroyed if someone chose to walk a self-determined path and not love selflessly anymore. The example of Ananias and Sapphira<sup>[19]</sup> shows what a disaster it is when Christians become insincere. Both of them sold their field, but were dishonest concerning their readiness to share, and lied to the apostles. They could have kept what they had. If they really have had good reason for it, there would have been no need to cover up their plan. They could have spoken about everything with openness and trust.

Dishonest people cannot remain in the church of God. The trust necessary for serving God together will be destroyed as soon as someone gives up the sincere wish to search for God’s will.

This takes us to the next point regarding the life of the first Christians: **community of property**.

## **5 “All the believers had everything in common” - community of property**

In Mark 10:28-30 quoted above, Jesus even promised his disciples houses and fields. This promise was fulfilled by the Christians because they did not consider their belongings their private possessions anymore. They had everything in common and shared their things with their brothers and sisters in faith. No one told them to do so. They were free to decide what they wanted to do with their possessions on the base of their conscience towards God. For someone looking from outside, community of property was indeed the most obvious expression of their trust and of how united and bound together they were. This is something that cannot be found in the world. Since they have become a new creation, they did not cling to their earthly belongings any longer. The imperishable things were their most precious treasure, and so it was natural for them to commit even the perishable things to the kingdom of God. They did not put everything into a common cash box, but gave according to what they had wherever there was need. This is not only reported in Acts 2 but also in chapter 4:32-37:

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For

from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

Wherever brotherly love is not found in today's so-called churches, where it is replaced with religious forms or the attendance of meetings, the readiness to share one's belongings will not be found either. Even church taxes, which are not written in the Bible at all, or tithes, commonly found among Evangelical groups, do not make it any better, since each individual only offers a fraction of what he considers his own. It is not surprising that theologians look for apparent arguments to justify the fact that community of property is not practised today. Many church members are fond of such arguments since they need some reason to conceal their selfishness with regard to material things. They say, for example, that the Christians of those days shared their possessions because they believed that Jesus would soon return and therefore thought that they would not need earthly goods much longer anymore. Sometimes they even say that the Christians had stopped working and through this the Jerusalem church had become poor. They argued that Paul then needed to collect money later in order to save the believers in Jerusalem from the threat of starvation that they themselves had supposedly caused.

In these "arguments" we see a malicious distortion of the love that God showed in the lives of the Christians. Such assertions are an accusation against the apostles because they imply that the apostles were not led by God's Spirit and had led the church into a dead end. Indirectly, Jesus' wisdom is also being questioned, who chose these men to build his church. They even ignore the fact that God himself confirmed the spiritual authority of the apostles by performing miracles through them. It is sad to see how people, especially theologians, prefer to undermine the apostles' authority and question the work of God rather than to critically examine their own lives before God, who sees the heart. Here we will look at the arguments in more detail:

The assumption that the first Christians expected Jesus' imminent return cannot be derived from the Bible. Jesus had commanded them to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth[20]. They were certainly not so unrealistic as to think that it would be accomplished in just a few years. We also read in John 21:18-19 that Jesus had promised Peter that he would die a cruel death in his old age. This is a clear hint that Peter would not experience Jesus' return during his lifetime on earth. The Christians wanted to be prepared to meet Jesus and lived in the expectation that this may happen at any time, whenever it might be. He himself had taught them (and everyone else) to be watchful since the Son of Man will come like a thief in the night[21].

They sold the land they did not need anymore. This had a particular reason. The pious Jews had the expectation that the Messiah would appear in Jerusalem. This is why it is assumed that they bought plots of land in and around Jerusalem to be buried there. In this way they hoped to be present on the spot when the Messiah comes at the resurrection of the dead on the last day. When they became Christians and understood that Jesus the Messiah had already come, they very probably sold these plots of land to support the needy. They however continued to live and gather in houses as we read in the passage in Acts 2.

We may also assume that the Christians in Jerusalem did not think any differently to Paul regarding work, who clearly rebuked some Christians who had been living idle lives in the letter to the Thessalonians:

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread

without paying for it, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. (*2 Thessalonians 3:6-12*)

Community of property among Christians definitely does not mean that you can just depend on what others have. Everyone should earn his living by working and live modestly so that he can also give to the needy.

The collection for the churches in Palestine which we read about in the New Testament[22] is not an argument that community of property did not work out. On the contrary it is an argument for how great a blessing community of property is in a larger frame. The reason for the first collection in the New Testament was the wide-spread famine reported in Acts 11:27-30:

Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

This famine certainly affected different regions of the Roman Empire to various extents. The Jews were simply poorer since they had to pay several taxes and levies: the tithes for the priests and their service at the temple, and taxes for the temple renovation, Caesar and the tax collectors. In such a situation it was natural for the Christians who were better off to help their brothers who were more severely affected in the impoverished Palestine—this readiness to share and help went without saying. We also find this among the churches which supported those in Judea during Paul's third missionary journey, which Paul reports concerning the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8:3-4:

For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints.

And he carried on encouraging the Corinthians:

I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. And in this matter I give my judgement: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack." (2 Corinthians 8:8-15)

Of course the collection should not cause anyone to be in need, but by sharing everyone should receive what he needs for a living. Paul's reasoning for this readiness to share was Jesus' attitude of being "poor" so that others may become "rich", and not the expectation of Jesus' imminent return. He considered this sharing the proof for the genuineness of their love. Christians should not love with words but in deed and in truth:

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

We find further encouragement to share in Hebrews 13:16:

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have [23], for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Even here we see that the reason for sharing what they had with the needy was not because they were expecting Jesus to return soon but because it was a sacrifice pleasing to God.

## ⌘ 5.1 Tithes

We would like to briefly write about tithes. As mentioned, this practice is wide-spread among evangelical denominations, and many probably think that it is taken from the Bible. To be sure, we can find something about it in the Bible, but not portrayed as a Christian practice. In the Old Testament it was meant to be a contribution that supported the service of the priests and Levites and was also used to pay for the sacrifices in the temple. [24] Besides that, every third year tithes were also distributed among the poor of the nation according to Deuteronomy 14:28-29. However, there is no sign of this practice among the Christians in the New Testament. What we find instead is that they shared everything. This is in line with the description in Acts 4:32—they were **one in heart and mind**. The trust that is as great as this, which is often not even found in families, does not reach its limit when it comes to money. They were able to trust each other this much because they knew each other's lives very well. They knew the sincerity their brothers had in seeking God's will. And on this basis they were able to entrust their money and other goods to each other, knowing that it will be used for God's purpose.



## ⚓6 Sheep among wolves

In the early stages the people of Jerusalem held the Christians in high esteem. It did not take long, however, before the prophecy was fulfilled which Jesus had foretold:

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.  
(*Matthew 10:16-22*)

From the beginning the Jewish religious leaders had been trying to suppress this new “sect”<sup>[25]</sup> from spreading. They were afraid of losing their influence on the nation and their honour from the people, and refused to hear the truth about their own lives.<sup>[26]</sup> So they forbade the apostles to speak, had them flogged and imprisoned them.<sup>[27]</sup> But “every day, in the temple and from house to house, they [the disciples] did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.” (Acts 5:42). After Stephen had made the members of the Sanhedrin aware of their guilt in murdering the righteous servant of God and began to show them how they were resisting God, he was stoned to death, and so became the first to follow his master’s example as a martyr.<sup>[28]</sup> From the reports about Paul we also learn of how he was persecuted because of his evangelistic activities, often by the Jews but also by the Gentiles.<sup>[29]</sup>

Christians were not people who adapted to the spirit of their time.<sup>[30]</sup> As members of God’s household<sup>[31]</sup> they were aware of their duty towards the truth of the Gospel and so held to it firmly, even in the face of unbelievers who resisted the call to repentance. These Christians wanted to show with their lives what the will of God for everyone is. Paul encouraged them to shine like lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.<sup>[32]</sup> This is the view they had of the world, and they knew that friendship with the world means enmity with God.<sup>[33]</sup> Hence the values they had and the works they did were totally different from that of the people around them, who lived their lives according to their own plans and desires. For those who did not accept it as a testimony of God’s work, it was taken as a personal accusation, which sometimes even led to violence towards the Gospel and those who proclaimed it.<sup>[34]</sup>

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries those who professed their faith in Jesus were outsiders in the society. They separated from the worldly pleasure in which most people found their enjoyment. They did not participate in public feasts nor religious rituals, but instead urged the people to repent of their sinful lives. In doing so they incurred hostility. Gruesome rumours were spread about them. During the times of state persecution, many were sentenced without any proof of their wrongdoing. You can find a collection of quotes that gives a more detailed insight of the situation by following this link ([“Quotations from early Christian writers”](#)).

## ⚓7 What does it mean for us?

The way of life of the first Christians was not a particular form they determined for themselves. They shared with each other and gave one another their everyday life, spare time, gifts and abilities, joy, suffering, money and property—everything life consists of. In every way they desired to help each other to remain

faithful in living for God. As the disciples of Jesus, they desired to follow his devotion, as apostle John writes:

By this we know love, that he [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16)

The love for each other, just as it is normal among brothers and sisters, was the expression of their love for God. John writes it clear and simple:

We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother [35], he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.(1 John 4:19-21)

The same thing applies today to everyone who wants to follow Jesus, that is, to become a Christian. To think that being a Christian is just a me-and-God relationship with some (occasional) attendance of religious meetings is self-deception, and it has great consequences. Christ's bride is the church, not an individual Christian. [36] The church is also called his body. He is the head that all members have to be joined to—the head that leads them all in their common service for God.[37] You can learn more about what Jesus wants the church to be like in other articles on this website, for example in "[The Church in the New Testament](#)".

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In our lives we would like to follow the example of the first Christians in every regard, and we invite you to do the same together with us. We meet in different places in various towns. We would be glad to take the effort of travelling greater distances to get in touch with people who seriously seek to follow Jesus. We know, not just from the words of Jesus [38], but also from our experience, that there are not many who want this. The history of mankind has always shown that the majority does not want to walk on God's ways.

Just like the first Christians, we too face rejection and slander, and are confronted with people who try to hinder us on our way. Because they themselves are not ready to submit their lives to God and his word, they try to categorize our love for God and our obedience as legalistic or exaggerated. We would like to invite each one not to be led by prejudices or be put off by them, but to do his duty to the truth by getting to know our lives and to form his own opinion on the base of Scripture.

Through our common life we want to testify to God's power to change us, and would like to encourage you not to be of little faith or to doubt whether we can still live this way today. We see not only how great a blessing it is but also how necessary this way of life is for growth in the real virtues: in humility and selflessness, in self-denial and devotion, in gentleness and patience, in regarding others higher than ourselves, in forgoing our own advantage and seeking what is best for others. Through this way of life we experience not only how Jesus can make us able to do all these things, but also how much more deeply we understand and experience his devotion and love for us, which leads us to thank and praise him more.

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Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we

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love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.(1 John 4:7-12)

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#### Footnotes

1. Luke 6:12-16.
2. John 13:34-35
3. John 5:30-46.
4. Luke 11:1.
5. Lukas 5,30-32.
6. Mark 6:31ff.
7. Luke 6:27-35.
8. John 10:11.
9. Luke 6:27-35
10. Matthew 16:21
11. Mark 1:14
12. See Psalm 32:1,5
13. Romans 5:5
14. Luke 14:33
15. Luke 9:23
16. James 5:16, Acts 19:18
17. Matthew 5:14-15.
18. Acts 5:12-14.
19. Acts 5:1-11.
20. Acts 1:8
21. Luke 12:35-40
22. e.g. in Romans 15:25-27
23. The Greek word koinonia does not stand for alms but the mutual help in the church
24. Nehemiah 10:37-38.
25. Acts 24:5,14
26. Jesus had spoken about it in John 8:37-47.
27. Acts 5:17-23, 40-41
28. Acts 7.
29. 2 Corinthians 11:22-27.
30. Romans 12:1-2, 1 Peter 4:1-5
31. Ephesians 2:19
32. Philippians 2:14-16
33. James 4:4.
34. 2 Corinthians 4:7-11.
35. As in other passages of the New Testament, to "hate" here also means something like to "have less regard for" or "put something behind something or someone more important"
36. Ephesians 5:25-27.

37. 1 Corinthians 12:12ff.

38. Luke 13:22-24.

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