

LIFE GROUP NOTES:

SERIES: Disciple

PART SEVEN: Escape Clause

Tax collectors and Some Pharisees and teachers of religious law now arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They asked him, 2 “Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition? For they ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat.”

*3 Jesus replied, “And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? 4 For instance, God says, ‘Honor your father and mother,’[a] and ‘Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.’[b] 5 But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, ‘Sorry, I can’t help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.’ 6 In this way, you say they don’t need to honor their parents. And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. 7 You hypocrites! **Matt. 15:1-7***

*Owe nothing to anyone—except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God’s law. 9 For the commandments say, “You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet.” These—and other such commandments—are summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to others, so love fulfills the requirements of God’s law. **Rom 13:8-10***



INTRODUCTION

We all like loopholes. They’re our way of getting around rules or laws. Looking for them comes naturally; nobody has to teach us. We’re always searching for them. Christians love loopholes too, as do all religious people. Every religion has a book or list, and every religion has scholars to help people get around actually doing the stuff written in those books or lists. Religion gives you a belief system that you don’t really follow; when it gets difficult, you find an escape clause.

Escape clause Christians really love theology. Theology is where we build the barricades that keep us from having to do what the Bible says. All kinds of horrible things have been justified in the name of theology. But the truth is, when you are a follower of Jesus, you quit searching for loopholes and you start looking for something else. You start asking completely different questions. In a conversation Jesus had with some experts on loopholes, we discover something that should make us rethink our whole approach to Christianity.

DISCUSSION STARTER

What are some of the loopholes you’ve seen other people come up with and take advantage of? Did their reasoning behind this strike you as clever, humorous, aggravating- or something else?

MESSAGE SUMMARY

Jesus doesn’t like it when we use his Father’s words to avoid doing his Father’s will. We all do this when we ignore the truths in the Bible we find inconvenient. We make lists, but our lists never fully match the lists in the Bible. We pick and choose our sins and describe some as worse than others. Jesus pushed back against this. He takes us back to what God first had in mind when he gave his commandments in Scripture. This was his thinking as he told his disciples: “A new command I give you: love one another” (John 13:34). He knew God wanted this to be primary. Then Jesus added, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

More than twenty years later, Paul echoed this as he wrote to the followers of Jesus in Rome: “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt of to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8 NIV). In other words, we should pay our debts- but this debt of loving one another is one we can never pay off. We owe it to the people around us to love them, because we owe it to our heavenly Father in light of how much he loves us. Paul went on to say that all the commands in the Old Testament “are summed up in this one command: “love your neighbour as yourself” (13:9 NIV).

This is what Jesus taught as well. The religious leaders asked him, “What’s the greatest command?” He responded, “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Then he added, “The second is this: love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31). Loving God and loving your neighbour as yourself- this is the filter through which we are to make every decision. The rest of Scripture is simply a

commentary on how to love in this way. Disciples of Jesus use the scriptures as a mirror. Each day they ask, “**What does love require of me?**” Not simply “What does the Bible say?”

Living and loving this way is much harder and more complicated than being an escape clause Christian. We reach out towards people nothing like us, because that’s what Jesus did. This can lead us into uncomfortable places and new kinds of relationships. This approach has nothing to do with abandoning your faith or compromising. It has everything to do with looking at others and asking, “**What does love require of me?**”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Why are we so eager to find escape clauses- especially religious ones?
- 2) How do Christians manufacture extra rules in order to preserve their own comforts or biases?
- 3) How would you describe your view of theology? Do you see it as helpful or harmful?
- 4) How can you tell if you’re more in love with the commands in the Bible than with the Commander?
- 5) Are you convinced that Jesus understood his Father’s intentions as written in the Bible? Why or why not?
- 6) How would you answer the question, “What does love require of me?”

KEY POINTS

- We naturally love loopholes as a way of escaping God’s requirements that we find uncomfortable, and we base these loopholes in the Bible.
- Jesus doesn’t like it when we use his Father’s words to avoid doing his Father’s will.
- Loving God and loving others is to be our filter for rightly guiding every situation in life. We’re to always ask, “What does love require of me?”

Moving Forward

What does it mean practically for you to be a debtor to other people, to owe them the continuing debt of love, according to Romans 13:8? Is this a new way of thinking for you? What will help you remember this obligation towards others in your daily life?

Preparing for session 8

Turn to Matthew 22:37-40, which is another account of a passage we looked at last week (Mark 12:28-34). Notice especially verse 40. What do you find most significant in this verse? What do you think Jesus wants us to understand most from his words here?

To help review and reinforce where we’ve been in these sessions, look at Acts 11:26. What new understanding do you have of this passage?

Look at Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16. Together with yesterday’s verse, these passages represent the three places the ‘word “Christian” is used in the Bible. Taken together, what do they tell us about this word?

Now reflect on the word ‘Disciple’ used in Acts 6:7, 9:26 and 9:36. What new understanding do you have of this word?