

June 4, 2017

## Christian: It's Not What You Think Loopholes

The title of the message today is Loopholes, because we all love loopholes. You know what a loophole is, it's a way to get around rules or laws. No one has to teach us to find a technically in a law this starts young. You remember finding loopholes with your parents when you were a kid. Your mom would be upset with you and you'd say, "Wait mom, you asked me if their parents were going to be home. And I knew eventually their parents would be return to their home. So when I said, yes, their parents were going to be home, I meant eventually. I didn't know you meant are their parents going to be home during the party. So technically I didn't lie. Remember that?"

**Christians love loopholes.** Actually, all religions love loopholes; every religion has a book of rules and laws and then hire people who help them find loopholes so they don't really have to keep those rules and laws. When the rules get to difficult we find loopholes so we don't have to do what's in the book.

Christians love loopholes they will say things like: I don't believe Jesus said that, or I don't believe Paul said that, or I don't believe the Bible was inspired by God, or that was part of the culture back then, but things are different now, or in the original language (the Bible was written) that really means something else. I was brought up Catholic and we had a loophole called confession. It was great. I could sin all I wanted, then go to confession on Saturday, get my sins forgiven by the priest, and start sinning all over again for the new week. That's not what the Catholic Church was teaching us to do, but it was something we used as a loophole. Protestants have the same loophole they just cut out the priest. They didn't have to confess to a priest they had something else, a verse. 1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Not only that but we were told that when God forgives us He remembers our sin no more. We would say God forgive me for doing that again and God would say, "what?"

Here's another thing **Loophole- Christians love theology.** And the reason they love theology is because through theology they can build a barricade that keeps them from doing what the Bible says. All kinds of horrible things have happened in the name of theology. One of the things I hear – and I'm not talking about us because we are Jesus followers and by the way, Jesus followers don't look for loopholes, they ask a whole other set of questions, so you would never do this, I'm just saying you might know somebody okay? – but I hear people say when it comes to theology, well that was in the Old Testament and the Old Testament, well, it's old, we don't follow those things any more. The most famous one is on tithing. Tithing is an Old Testament thing, but we are in the New Testament now therefore I don't have to tithe. And that's an example of a theological loophole and it is technically correct and that's the purpose of a loophole – it is something that is technically correct. You didn't ask if the parents would be home during the party, but I think we knew what they meant, right?

But when you ask a different set of questions as followers of Jesus do, you don't look for loopholes; because it's dangerous to be a loophole Christian. Because you can be a loophole Christian and believe anything you want to, and you can be a loophole Christian and live any way you want to. Do you know that Christians have actually used God's word to hate people? In the past Christians found a verse that they believed allowed them to persecute and kill Jews. Christians found a verse that they believed allowed them to have black slaves and to mistreat them. Christians found a verse that they believe allows them to mistreat gay people. They actually found a way to mistreat people that God loves and Jesus died for by using His Word. That's amazing. Just give me a minute, I'll find a verse for just about any behavior I want. That's what loophole Christians do. They love theology because they can use theology to justify just about anything. But we are not going to settle for just Christian are we?

You see Christians ask questions like this: How close can I get to sin without actually sinning? How bad can I be, how mean I can be, how self-righteous can I be, how close I can get to the edge of ... whatever it is without actually sinning. That's the kind of questions loophole Christians ask. Jesus followers, they ask an entire different set of questions.

Jesus ran into this all the time. You see by the time Jesus showed up the religious people kind of fell in love with the commands and forgot the intentions of the Commander. By the time Jesus showed up they had so many rules - actually they had 100's and 100's of rules - to help them from breaking the rules. And over time they started to equate the rules to keep them from breaking the rules with the original rules. And it is one of these conversations that we discover something about Jesus that should make us rethink our whole approach to Christianity as it relates to loopholes.

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law (these are the experts in theology) came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples (there's our word) break the tradition of the elders? (this tradition of the elders was formed after Moses was long gone to keep people from accidentally breaking the law. So they were saying to Jesus, your disciples are breaking the traditions, not the law given through Moses, but the traditions we have created over time.) They don't wash their hands before they eat!"  
Matthew 15:1-2 NIV

Now before parents say, I didn't even know that was in the Bible that's awesome, look here kids it says in the Bible says you have to wash your hands before you eat! That's not what this is: In the law the priests, just the priests had to do these washings of their hands up to their elbows so they would be considered ceremonially pure. As time went by the Pharisees decided to apply that to everybody, so that all Jewish people had to do these washings and over time this became required, but it wasn't part of Moses' law. Evidently Jesus' followers did not wash in a way that satisfied the Pharisees or the tradition of the elders.

You should never question Jesus, He ignores their question and says I have an even better question for you:

Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?"

Matthew 15:3

Let's forget the tradition of the elders let's go back to the Ten Commandments. Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition, Jesus turns it around on them and they must be thinking, what are you talking about. So Jesus continues...

For God said, (let's go back to the basics, for God said) 'Honor your father and mother' (that's back to the basics that's in the top 10 right?) and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'

Matthew 15:4

Aren't you kind of glad we abandoned that part of the commandment? Some of us wouldn't be here. But Jesus throws it back on them, He says you're getting on my followers for breaking a law created so we don't break a law and you're breaking the actual commandment God gave to begin with.

But you say (they have taken the command of God and twisted it so they could do the very opposite of what God commanded. Again they are all about the command and not the Commander, they forgot all about the intent of the law. They've developed a loophole a work-around. So here's what Jesus says) that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. (Let me explain what's happening here. There was this command of God to honor your father and mother, and they thought, well that's fine for children and adolescence but honor your father and mother that doesn't have an age limit, that's indefinite. And they had a problem with that. Because when you get older honoring your father and mother gets expensive. And they thought whoa, okay we want to keep the commands of God but we don't want to spend all our money on our aging parents. Some of our parents live on and on and on, and of course they didn't have places in those days to put them for elder care so they lived at home. So they came up with a great idea. There was a sort of twist in another law that had to do with dedicating everything to God and so they came up with this rule: they would dedicate everything they own to God and when their aging parent needed money to pay the rent they could say, gee I'd love to help you out but I've dedicated everything to God. So to help you out I would be robbing God. Oooh, they should not have brought this up to Jesus. See they were saying to their mom and dad, I'd really love to help you, but I've dedicated everything to God and I have to hang on to what I got in case the Lord needs it. So they actually made a rule that would enable them to not help or honor their parents but not break God's law. Thus, Jesus says...

Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition.

Matthew 15:5-6

Now before we get all high and mighty on the Pharisees, we all do this. You nullify, In other words, you take the unclear and you fog the clear. You lean into, I think it would

be alright and if we just look at it this way, and turn it that way, and you just ignore what is clear and in plain sight. You have taken what God has said and you've twisted it to serve your purposes. What does Jesus think of that?

You hypocrites!

Matthew 15:7

Here's the moral of the story, here's the bottom line:

Jesus doesn't like it when we use His Father's words to avoid doing His Father's will.

Jesus doesn't like it when we use His Father's words, to work around, to find a loophole, to get around doing His Father's will.

So Jesus shows up and He does the most brilliant thing, He comes along and says, let's forget the commands, I want to talk about the intent of the Commander. Forget all the details for a minute; I want to take you back to what God had in mind when God gave the first commandments. Why would God give us commands? Why would God care about our morality? Why would God mess with our marriage? Why would He tell us how to raise our kids? Why in the world would God care? Let's pull way, way back, let's start at the beginning. And so He says to His guys:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

John 13:34 NIV

This is the beginning, put this at the top. He says, by this, by the way you love, this is how everyone is going to know you are my follower. Not by your theology, not how you interpret certain verses, the way you love each other is going to be THE thing that communicates more than anything else if you are My follower. Then He says this, love as I have loved you. That's how you are supposed to love one another. Now, here is the cool thing this took hold. When the followers of Jesus got together, the Jewish converts, the non-Jewish converts, Greeks, Romans; when they gathered this is what drove them. Because they had different world views, some had access to the Jewish law, some didn't, they came from different cultures this became the filter – and this is so important – this became the filter through which they made every single relational decision. You have a marriage problem ok we know what Paul said, but let's back up a second to love one another, this became the filter. Because 20 something years later, like 25 years later Jesus has gone back to heaven, the church is starting to spread, there are Christians in the city of Rome, where Nero is persecuting Christians. And Paul writes them a letter and he goes back to this basic teaching it all begins with love one another. And I want you to listen to how far he pushed this.

Let no debt remain outstanding, (in other words pay your debt) except the continuing debt (the continuing debt – you never pay this one off) to love one another, (in other words he says, hey Jesus followers, I want you to wake up every day understanding you are in debt to the people around you. You owe it to them to love them because you

owe it to your heavenly Father for the way He has loved you. If you could say to God, "thank you so much, what can I do for you for loving me." God would say, "Love one another." You have a continuing debt of love, for – are you ready for this, is everyone ready for this? This is huge. If you have been doing something else, if you haven't been paying attention, here this, this is a shocker) **for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.**

**Romans 13:8 NIV**

Then he goes on in case we missed it.

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and (check this out) **whatever other commandment there may be, (which means any other verses you find, everything God said about marriage, everything God said about raising children, everything God said about finances, or running a business, or do all as unto the Lord, all this other stuff) are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."**

**Romans 13:9 NIV**

You are to wake up each day with this one intention on your heart, to love your neighbor as yourself. Do you know how powerful this is, do you know how simplifying this is? Do you know how clarifying this is? Actually, it's too clear isn't it? I rather read something and think, but He didn't say... I got a loophole. And Paul is saying no, no that's not how it works it begins right here, love your neighbor as yourself. This is what Jesus taught. When they asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment He said, well I'll tell ya, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and I have to add, and they said no, no we just like that one. And He said I know you do but can't summarize it in just this one ...and your neighbor ... as yourself. And then Jesus said, everything else comes next, everything else is secondary. In other words love your neighbor is the filter through which you are to make every single decision. And the rest of scripture is simply commentary on what it is when you decide to love one another. In other words, don't you dare take a passage, a verse, a chapter, a story and use it to un-love someone else you hypocrite! You see, **Disciples don't look for workarounds and loopholes.** Christians do. Religious people do. Disciples don't look through the Bible asking how little can I do. Disciples use the Bible like a mirror. Every day when a disciple wakes up they ask this question, **What does love require of me?** See that is where we must begin. It begins with love your neighbor as yourself, it begins with love one another as I have loved you. It begins with this question, in light of what's happening in my marriage, in light of what's happening at my job, in light of what's happening in my relationships with children, parents, brothers, sisters, prodigals; what does love require of me? This is much clearer, but this is not easier, this is much harder. It's just much easier to have a verse and say, see there, but to take the Word of God with all its complexities and say, okay, what does love require? Christians like to talk about people, disciples? There are times you are going to have to talk TO people. Disciples move in the direction of people they don't like because that's what Jesus did. People who were nothing like Jesus liked Jesus, and Jesus who was nothing like them liked them you know why? Because He represented the Commander not just the

commandments. This will draw you out of your comfort zone, this will draw you into new kinds of relationships, will draw you to think, do, and say things you never thought you would think, do, or say. It will draw you into conversations with people where you actually listen. It will have you checking your motives and asking the question what does love require of me. Jesus, Paul, John all said the same thing, that all the law is subservient, all the law comes underneath, the law is always secondary, the commands all flow from the one new command that Jesus gave when He said, "Love one another." You see things may be bad at home, but you show me a husband and wife who decides I have a debt of love, and I'm going to start every conversation through the filter of, What does love require of me? What if you parented that way? What if you responded to your boss that way? Can you begin to see the transformation that would take place?

Now I know you have questions, what about , what about, what about...? Let me answer all your questions with this one question: Aren't you glad God didn't look for a loophole when it came to His love for you? Aren't you glad God didn't take out the Old Testament and say, "I don't think so, buddy?" Aren't you glad God didn't say, "you want what? Look I've been taking notes of your whole life and your thoughts and you dare ask Me for a favor, are you kidding Me?" I don't know about you, but I know that I have given my Heavenly Father, 10,000 loopholes to not love me. And if He didn't think He should use any of them, how do I think I have the right to look and use a loophole not to love you? Of course it's complicated, and of course it's hard, and of course it's easier to just go back to the way you have always thought, and the way you have always behaved. Of course it's easier. That is why there are Christians everywhere, doing all kinds of stuff, thinking all kinds of things. But NOT the followers of Jesus. Because we wake up every day and ask this tough question, What does love require of me? What if we just tried that for a week? What if we would at least ask the question and think of what the other options might be? What if before we said or did anything to our spouse, child, parent, boss or whoever we at least asked the question? What if this week whenever you are eyeball to eyeball with anyone, even when things were really bad, we would say, "Ok, if I were a disciple, a follower of Jesus, if I weren't a mere Christian, what would love require of me? I tell you that is a transformational question. So what does love require of you? Next week I'm going to tell you. Really specifically, it's going to be awful. It's going to be great for it may change us in a wonderful way. But for this week let's just ask each day, What does love require of me?

The followers of Jesus do not look for loopholes and shortcuts in their faith. Instead they align their hearts with the loving heart of God, and in every situation they ask this question: What does love require of me?