**Why in the World: Leader Guide**

**Session 4 Putting Religion in Its Place**

**Discussion Starter**

*Do you tend to follow rules to the letter, bend them when it suits you, or outright break them? In what ways do you think that tendency has influenced the way you view God?*

**Video Overview**

***For Session 4 of the DVD***

When religion is treated as a rigid absolute, it tends to collapse under the weight of the real world. You hear someone preach a sermon about how to have a great family life. The speaker gives you a series of steps to follow, but when you get home, those steps aren’t as simple or effective as they sounded on that Sunday morning you heard the sermon, but life is usually a lot messier. And God is a lot less predictable.

The other problem with religion is that when people put it in first place, they become self-righteous, hypocritical, and angry. There’s a connection between self-righteousness and anger because self-righteous people secretly wish they could commit the sins they publicly denounce. This self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and anger give a lot of people the wrong idea about God and drive them out of the church. It’s tragic.

But here’s the interesting thing. When you read the Gospels, you find that battle against the kind of religious devotion that breeds self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and anger. Jesus and the religious leaders of his day believed the law of Moses was important. Jesus and the religious leaders of his day also believed that people were important. What they argued over was how to prioritize the law and people.

Jesus consistently prioritized people over his own religion. That’s a shocking idea because Jesus is the Son of God. But he *always* prioritized people over his own religion, customs, and traditions. The Pharisees couldn’t understand what Jesus was up to. From their perspective, it didn’t add up that he claimed to be from God yet often appeared to compromise---or sometimes even break---the law. Jesus would say that no one should ever change the law of Moses, and then he would seem to disregard the law for the sake of some poor soul or someone in need. It was confusing and even offensive to the Pharisees.

One day, Jesus clarified his view of the relationship between the law and people.

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

The law said you’re not supposed harvest on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were trying to catch Jesus and his disciples in a technically. The disciples were picking grain, but they weren’t really harvesting. They were having a snack. Jesus responds by challenging the Pharisees’ application of religion. He brings up a story from the Old Testament.

He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” (Mark 2:25-26)

David is one of the spiritual giants of Judaism. To the Pharisees, he was untouchable. Yet Jesus pitted their rigid religious interpretations against David. He followed up that challenge with a statement that is clarifying, disturbing, and enormously important. It’s a statement that makes Christianity messy and wonderful. It’s a statement that may even go to the heart of what you most struggle with in terms if your relationship with the church.

 Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.  So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

God dint create laws and then create human beings to keep those laws. That’s backwards. The laws are important. But God created people, then created the laws so those people could better know him and what he values. Great parents decide that their children are more important than the laws parents set. And God is a perfect heavenly Father. He created the law for people---for his children.

Sometimes great parents break the rules because their kids are more important to them than the rules they made. Sometimes they break the rules and their kids are happy. Sometimes they break the rules because their kids are the top priority.

That’s what your heavenly Father does. It makes religious people nervous. But Jesus came to put religion in its place. It’s not first place; it’s second place. He never leveraged theology in order to avoid helping someone.

That doesn’t mean Jesus’ theology was wrong or weak. He was God dwelling among us. His theology was perfect. But Jesus’ conscience was formed by compassion, not consistency, because love demands inconsistency. The moment we put religion ahead of people, we move backwards, away from Jesus. Jesus was so inconsistent that instead of letting our sin separate us from our heavenly Father, he *became* our sin, allowed himself to die on a cross, and then rose from the dead in order to conquer death on our behalf. He didn’t do that because that’s what love demanded.

 Jesus didn’t die for precepts and principles. Jesus died for people.

 Jesus didn’t die for the law. Jesus died for the lawless.

 Jesus didn’t die for a set of rules. Jesus died for rule-breakers.

 Jesus didn’t even die for sin. Jesus died for sinners.

 Jesus didn’t die for a view. Jesus died for a you.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are some reasons people find rules comfortable and comforting?
2. Are there things about religion that you find constraining or stifling? If so, what are those things?
3. Read Isaiah 1:13, 17. How do these verses challenge most people’s views of God? What do they tell us about what he values?
4. During the message, Andy said, *“Jesus consistently prioritized people over his own religion, customs, and traditions.”* Respond to that statement. In which ways does it challenge your assumptions about Jesus?
5. Is it difficult for you to believe that God values you above His own rules? Why or why not?
6. What is one thing you can do this week to prioritize loving God and loving other people over your religion, customs, and traditions? What can this group do to support you?

**Moving Forward**

Do you know what’s most important to God? It’s not His law. It’s you. Why in the world did Jesus come as one of us? Why in the world did God show up as a human being on a planet full of strife, suffering, and injustice? One of the reasons was that he wanted to put religion---all religion--- in its place. And religion’s place is right behind you.

**Changing Your Mind**

*Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’  All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

Matthew 22:37-40