



Carry On!

When our version of religion gets in the way of love, we've created the wrong version of religion. We know this is true because in the eyewitness account John gave, Jesus presents himself as the human representation of what God is really like—compassionate, empathetic, and above all, loving... even when love demands action that breaks 'the rules.' And so when our ideas, beliefs, or ideologies get in the way of loving people who God loves, John would encourage us to throw them out and respond instead with the love of Jesus, which mandates that the *person* beside us takes precedent over the potentially flawed view inside us.

Discussion

Start Talking

Do you remember the first time you noticed a disconnect between religion and God, between "the rules" and what was actually right? Describe that situation.

(Examples: a spiritual leader who operated out of a sense of superiority, a friend, family member, or public figure who used religion to justify their own prejudices.)

What do you wish you could say to your younger self watching that situation?

Looking Back

What actions, thoughts, and decisions from the past week actually sprung from your belief that Jesus is who he claimed to be?

When and where did you find yourself (while still mentally maintaining faith in Jesus), operating as if he was not in control?

What About You?

1. Have you ever held a sincere belief that you later came to see as flawed? What was it? How did you come to know your opinion was incomplete or mistaken?



2. What implications does the fact that our opinions could be flawed have for the way we should treat people based upon those potentially-flawed beliefs? When we're uncertain, what should we default to?
3. Andy claims that human beings are in danger of losing sight of love any time we prioritize commandments over compassion, and theological systems, political ideologies, or party loyalties over the people these things are supposed to serve. Have you ever seen anyone do this? Have you ever done this, yourself?
4. Is it possible to anticipate instances in which we will be tempted to let our theological ideas, political opinions, or party loyalties lead us to treat people poorly? If so, how?

Look It Up

Read the Following Passages: John 5: 1-19 and 37-42, 1 John 4:7-12

1. Based upon what we read in the first passage, how do you think the religious systems of the ancient world regarded people who were suffering illness?
2. As absurd as it may seem to modern readers, why do you think that the religious officials accused the man who Jesus had healed of violating the commandment not to work on the Sabbath? What would Jesus say to their reasoning?
3. Upon meeting after being chastised by the religious leaders, why does Jesus tell the healed man to "stop sinning" for fear that "something worse may happen to him?" What did Andy have to say about this interaction?
4. The religious leaders here accuse Jesus of equating himself with God. Do you think this was an accurate accusation?
5. John, a witness to the life of Jesus, writes that God *is* love. What do you take this to mean?

Putting It All Together

1. What specific religious rules, theological ideas, or political opinions in your life are keeping you from loving people who God loves?
2. How will you prioritize love over these 'commandments' in the coming week?
3. Andy argued that Jesus is a "living commentary" on the scriptures. What does this mean to you? How should it affect our interpretation of scripture? Our understanding of God?
4. Are there any areas of your life where fear of religious people, theological rules, or political pressures are keeping you from experiencing the freedom of the love Jesus embodied? What would Jesus say about those people, rules, or political factions?
5. What specific steps can you take to reorient your version of Christianity to look more like Jesus?

