

YOU'RE  
NOT  
FAR

## You're Not Far

### Part Four: Loophole Religion

One message connected all the individual parables and miracles in the minds of Jesus' first century listeners– the Kingdom of God is here, *now*, and it represents a complete reversal of the values of the world, extending an open invitation to *everyone* to get involved in the constructive work of making all things new. Jesus brought a radical reminder that our love for the people around us is a reflection of our love for God. Rather than a series of man made rules that allow us to maintain a religious appearance while serving ourselves, followers of Jesus have been invited to participate in a kingdom of conscience informed by a single law, the law of Christ– to love others the way God, through Christ, has loved each of us. There are no loopholes in that kind of love.

#### Start Talking

1. What is your favorite loophole? (Ex: diet doesn't apply on Taco Tuesdays, cash income is conveniently forgotten during tax season, it's okay to say no to those in need if you suspect they have ill motives, etc...)
2. What hypocritical behavior drives you the most crazy when you observe it in others?

#### Looking Back

1. How did you reorient your mindset this past week to value those God loves more than your own interpretation of God's laws?
2. Were there any times when you were tempted to keep your preoccupation with the rules from practicing love for other people? How did you respond?
3. Andy talked about Jesus' determination to "reverse the order of things." Where are you allowing your behavior, mindset, or beliefs to be swept along by our cultural "order of things?" Where and how did you trade that in for the better ethic of the Kingdom of God last week?



## What About You?

1. Did you grow up with any religious traditions that, looking back, made God seem small and petty?
2. Are you inclined to believe that confessing your sin to God makes things right between you and God, regardless of whether or not you've made things right with the person you sinned against? If so, why?
3. Where do you tend to look for loopholes when it comes to enacting what love requires of you? How do you justify it?
4. As ridiculous as it sounds, have you ever tried to figure out how close you can get to sin without actually sinning?
5. Do you ever feel guiltier about neglecting a religious ritual than neglecting to care for other people? Why?

## Look It Up

*Read the Following Passages: Mark 1:14-15, 2:23-27, 3:20-22, 6: 54-56, 7:1-15, 8:31 - 33.*

1. Jesus accused religious leaders of nullifying the intent of God's commands with made-up traditions (Mark 7:13). Can you think of any modern-day examples of this?
2. What was it about Jesus' teaching and actions that caused people to think he was out of his mind, or possessed by the devil?
3. Why did the Pharisees seem so concerned with unwritten rules? How did Jesus respond to their obsession with enforcing these arbitrary preferences? Why do you think he was so harsh?
4. What was the conflict between the real commands of God and the unwritten rules of the Pharisees?
5. Why is it so important to make things right with the people we've hurt, and not just see the problem as being, "between me and God?"

## Putting It All Together

1. Where have you let go of the commands of God in order to hold onto human traditions? What loopholes have you come up with?
2. How can you return to what love requires of you this week?
3. Who do you need to make things right with this week? Who have you neglected to treat well, while still managing to keep the rules of personal religion?
4. What does love require of you this week, as fear of sickness tempts us all to hoard resources and look out for ourselves above others? What are three ways you can practice the love of Jesus even when it's inconvenient?

