

“I Want to Believe but...Killjoy God”
Matthew 23:25-26 (NIV), Romans 3:20-24 (NIV)
October 21, 2018

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Again, a reminder in this series---much thanks to Craig Groeschel and lifechurch for the sermon points.

Last week, “I want to believe but, On Demand God.” God doesn’t give me what I ask for when I ask for it. Well, an On Demand God does not exist, but God is always loving, His ways are always higher, and God’s presence is always enough.

Next week—a tough one, but one we all deal with. I want to believe, but...Heartless God. There are so many tragedies in the world and happenings in my life that I can’t believe a loving God would allow them to happen. Wow---those are thoughts perhaps we have all had. Invite a friend.

Today, I want to believe but...Killjoy God. I don’t want to be held down by religion. I’d rather have fun and happiness in my life. I want to believe in God, but there are too many rules. So many do’s and don’ts. I want to have fun and enjoy life.

Let me pause and say---the last thing I want is to live a boring life. I too want to have fun and enjoy life.

Some Christians do not attract non-Christians because, well because they are legalistic, boring, snooty, judgmental and hypocritical. Some say, “My life is going pretty good, why do I need to believe in God?”

Let me share some Bad News/Good News about religion. First of all, when I talk about religion I’m not talking about faith in God or Christianity, but I’m talking about man made rules that people have made to try and please God.

Religion focuses on the external not the internal.

A comment that makes me cringe is when it is said, “A person claims one thing, but doesn’t live it.” Ouch!

Matthew 23:25-26 New International Version (NIV) ²⁵ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

It as is Jesus says, “That’s all external stuff, I’m concerned about the internal.” You see we have a problem when your religious “show” (yes, I just used the term religious show) doesn’t match up with your heart---the internal and how you live.

But you may say, “If I do religious ‘things’ won’t I be closer to God? You know---follow the rules. You know---try harder, do religious things, and don’t do bad things like ‘don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t chew and don’t run with girls that do.” The concept of “if I don’t do bad things I’ll be right with God” is not really correct.

Jesus said to not be like the Pharisees. The Pharisees would be in the street and pray loud and long. They had their fancy robes and tassels and ‘tried to look holy---look religious.’ Those same Pharisees would take advantage of widows, lie to people and then throw rules on everyone.

In the Old Testament well meaning religious leaders came up with over 600 brand new laws so you wouldn’t break the original laws of God. There were 65 dos and don’ts about the Sabbath alone. When these laws were composed in the 3rd Century in the Mishnah the book was over 800 pages long of the man-made laws added to the laws of God. The Pharisees crushed people with unbearable religious demands and laws.

I want to believe God, but what a Killjoy---so many rules and laws. It’s too oppressive. Boring. No way I could keep those so why even try.

However, the rules/laws that God established are not to confine us, but to free us to have an abundant joyful life. And yet we get these mixed up.

The Barna group did a survey in 2013. Do Christians have the attitudes and actions of Pharisees or the attitudes and actions of Jesus.

The findings reveal that most self-identified Christians in the U.S. are characterized by having the attitudes and actions researchers identified as Pharisaical. Just over half of the nation’s Christians—using the broadest definition of those who call themselves Christians—qualify for this category (51%). They tend to have attitudes and actions that are characterized by self-righteousness.

On the other end of the spectrum, 14% of today’s self-identified Christians—just one out of every seven Christians—seem to represent the actions and attitudes Barna researchers found to be consistent with those of Jesus.

In the middle are those who have some mix of action and attitude. About one-fifth of Christians are Christ-like in attitude, but often represent Pharisaical actions (21%). Another 14% of respondents tend to be defined as Christ-like in action, but seem to be motivated by self-righteous or hypocritical attitudes.

(Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees? Research Release in Faith and Christianity, June 3, 2013)

What you believe and how you act does make a difference. Most people aren’t rejecting Christ, they are rejecting how Christ is wrongly represented.

Well, I'm a bit depressed now---all the bad news. You want the bad news or the good news...well I've shared the bad news so let's get to the good news. Before I do, let me make a comment about the term Killjoy God. Beloved, Jesus wants you to have joy. He said in the Gospel of John (15:11) that His joy was to be in you and that your joy could be made complete. In fact, think about it. His first miracle was at a wedding feast. Yes, Jesus was a party person. You don't invite a joy sucker to a wedding party. And then Jesus performed the miracle of turning water into 'sparkling grape juice.' Jesus was a person of joy and wants us to have joy. From Killjoy God to "Life-Joy" God.

Here's the good news. **Romans 3:20-21 New International Version (NIV)** ²⁰ **Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.** ²¹ **But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.**

As we let this sink in let's write down 3 Simple Truths.

3 Simple Truths

1. You cannot earn God's acceptance by obeying the law.

No matter how hard you try, how many good works, no matter how religious that is not how you get God's acceptance. Religion says good works will please God. Scripture says you cannot be good enough to please God.

3 Simple Truths

1. You cannot earn God's acceptance by obeying the law.

2. The purpose of the law is to show you you need a savior.

The scripture said NO ONE will be declared righteous by works of the law. But it is through the law that we become aware of our sin.

People may say, "I'm not a bad person." As a pastor, now don't shoot the messenger, I say... "You're a sinner." And the response, "Well, don't judge me!" However, the law shows us that each and every one of us is a sinner.

We have a tendency to compare ourselves to others. For example, you know that you are better than the person at the end of your pew...DON'T LOOK for heaven's sake! ☹️ But let's not compare ourselves to others but compare yourself to God. It is then when we realize that we ALL fall short. Believe me...I'm always short!

(Image) Until you see yourself as a sinner, you won't see your need for a Savior.

You can't ever be good enough for God. The purpose of the law is to show, "I'm not good enough. I need grace. I need mercy. I need forgiveness. I need help."

3 Simple Truths

1. You cannot earn God's acceptance by obeying the law.

2. The purpose of the law is to show you you need a savior.

3. Being right with God comes by faith in Christ alone.

Romans 3: 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

To ALL who believe. Believe not in religiosity or rules, but believe in Jesus. You do not need religion---you need Jesus. You do not need religion you need Christ alone. You do not need religion---you need a relationship with the Savior.

Religion is about performance and doing. Christianity is all about Jesus and being (being in Jesus).

RELIGION:	CHRISTIANITY:
What I do	What Jesus has done
About me	About Jesus
Do	Done
If obey	Because He loves—I want to obey

Religion says, “If I try really really hard, and if I obey, then maybe God will love me.”
Christianity says, “Because God love me I am acceptable in Christ. I choose to obey and want to follow His way.

Religion complicated what God made simple.

(image) Religion complicates with laws, but Jesus simplifies with love.

When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus did not name any of the 600. He simply said, Love God, love others.

Religion complicates. Jesus simplifies. We can’t earn it and we certainly don’t deserve it. We will never ever be good enough.

I am a sinner who needs a Savior. I guess I got to try harder---NO!!! Religion complicates. Jesus simplifies. It is not about you being perfect, but its all about Jesus. You cannot work your way to God.

We make Christianity to complex. It is not about religion it’s about relationship.

Pastor Craig Groeschel puts it this way: "God, help me to simplify it with your love. Help me to get this one thing right. To love you with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength. As you love me, God, help me to love myself and show your love to everyone else. God, help me to embrace the simplicity, the power, and the majesty of your love."

Not a Killjoy God, but a God that gives life...eternal life. Religion complicates with laws, Jesus simplifies with love.

Here it is Christianity in one simple sentence of love.

We sinned. Christ died. God forgave.