

Religion

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Date: 17 March 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks for joining us today. I'm Pastor Steve Frenzmeyer. I'm one of the pastors here at First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. I'm glad that you decided to watch us today, and I just pray that our time together is meaningful and that the Lord speaks to you somehow. So before we get started, why don't we just go ahead and start with a word of prayer, okay?

Father God, I thank you so much for today and for the time that you have given us here. Lord, I thank you for the word that you give us, the truth that you give us.

And Lord, I just pray that as we go through this today that you would just allow me to get out of the way and allow your Holy Spirit to work through the words that I speak. God, I thank you for your word, because it is the truth.

And God, just bless our time. In Jesus' name, amen. All right. Got a question for you. Are you a rule follower?

Okay. Were you the kid that when you were in school that you always sat in the front row and followed every rule that your teacher set forth in the classroom?

[1 : 1 1] Ah. Or were you one of the kids that made up their own rules as time went along? So were you one of those? Oh, me? Remember when you were a kid and you would play a game with your neighborhood, your friends or your brothers and sisters, and there was always that one kid that would change the rules of the game right in the middle.

He would change the rules, of course, to benefit him or her. And it sounds a lot like our modern day politicians, but we're not going to go there today. We make the rules in our favor.

Believe it or not, having rules and then modifying them to go in the favor of us, of a few select people, is nothing new.

And it isn't just subject to our modern day politics. Today we wrap up our series on God is greater than. Today we conclude with God is greater than my religion.

So we're going to start right off the bat here this morning with Matthew, the 22nd chapter, verses 34 through 40. Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.

[2 : 3 1] One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question, Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?

And then Jesus replied, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second, just like it, love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.

So to give you just a little bit of back history here, the Sadducees were a group of Jews. Now they didn't really hold true to a lot of the traditional Jewish theology.

They were prominent people in their culture. They were the politicians, they were the bigwigs, and they often held positions in government and presided over religious events and festivals. But although they were Jews, they often sided with and tried to be more like the Romans who were in control of that area.

[3 : 38] They were considered the elitists. And then you had the Pharisees. These guys were considered the religious authorities.

They felt that Jews should literally follow every Jewish law right down to the smallest letter. But even though the Sadducees and Pharisees did not get along, nor agree with each other at times, they had one common enemy.

And that was Jesus. You see, both groups hated Jesus. They considered a Jesus to be a threat to them. They were afraid that Jesus would compromise their power and their authority.

And most of them who held these positions, not because they were to honor the Lord, rather they could honor themselves in their positions.

They were the kids in the neighborhood that changed the rules right in the middle of the game if it benefited them. And you know, Jesus, of course, could see right through them.

[4 : 50] He knew their hearts and their motives. And Jesus knew that all they were claiming to be, claiming to uphold the law, was just to see themselves right.

In fact, in Matthew 23, verses 13-39, Jesus calls the Pharisees and the Sadducees, He calls them blind guides, whitewashed tombs, hypocrites, and even snakes.

Doesn't sound very flattering, does it? He compares them to whitewashed tombs. They look good on the outside. They may be doing all the right things, saying all the right things, and maybe they may be giving to the church as well.

But in their hearts, they're completely self-serving, self-glorifying, corrupt, and they're full of pride. So let's go back to the text real quick.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. Now, that doesn't sound too good, does it? These two snakes and the whitewashed tombs getting together to plan how they could trick Jesus.

[6 : 07] So their trick question of the day was, which is the greatest commandment in the law? You see, the Sadducees and the Pharisees were so-called rule followers.

If I follow these rules, if I obey this set of rules, then I have done everything I can possibly do. I've done everything that the law has asked me to do.

So their thought in this is, my religion will save me. If I can do all the right things, then I can consider myself a religious person, and that and that alone can save me because I've done the right things.

Dictionary.com defines religion as, religion is a specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or a sex.

Here you see that religion is a set of man-made rules. And in our world, it's estimated that right now there are over 10,000 different religions all throughout the world because, see, religion is man's attempt to reach God.

[7 : 32] In Mark, the 10th chapter, verses 17 through 22, it tells us a story of what we commonly refer to as the rich young ruler.

And so the text begins, As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. Good teacher, he asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Why do you call me good, Jesus said? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal.

You shall not give false testimony. You shall not defraud. And honor your mother and your father. And then he says, Teacher, all these things I have kept since the day I was a boy.

Basically, he's saying, Jesus, I'm a rule follower, and I've been following all these rules my entire life. my entire life. I haven't killed anyone.

[8 : 40] Check that one off. I haven't committed adultery. Check. I haven't stolen anything. Let's check that one off. I haven't lied. Let's check that one off.

I haven't defrauded anyone. Check. And I've honored my mother and my father. Check. How many of us view Christianity as just that?

A checklist. I went to church today. Check. I gave some money to the church. Check. I even served at church someday in some capacity.

Check. And also, I've attended X number of Bible studies this past year. Check. And I've served and been on 233 different Emmaus walks over the course of my life.

So check. I've been on X number of men's retreats, women's retreats, and we check those things off. And we check those off one by one. Thinking that we have fulfilled our obligation to the church and to God.

[9 : 53] Or as if we receive a badge that we can put on our chest for all the things that we have done. It's kind of like we're building a Christian resume. That I've done this and this and this and this and this and this.

So at this point in our walk with Christ, it's been limited and reduced to just marking things off a checklist once they've been completed.

Now you may be saying, Hey, Steve-O, are you saying that all these things are bad? Absolutely not. Those things are good. It's good to follow rules.

It's good to obey the Ten Commandments. It's good for us to go to church. It's good for us to tithe and to give financially to your local church. It's a good thing to serve in your church.

It's a good thing to go to Bible studies. And it's a good thing to attend and to serve on Emmaus walks. Those are all good things. They're all good things.

[10 : 53] The problem becomes when we place more emphasis on the things that we do for God than what God has done for us.

When our religion comes down to the things that we do and it's not about who God is. You see that? It's almost like a math equation.

My good deeds plus obeying the rules equals my religion. And with all that, if I follow the rules, do the right things, then my religion will save me.

Jesus addressed that with the rich young ruler. In Mark 10, 21 through 22, Jesus looked at him and loved him.

And then he says, The man went away.

[12 : 11] Why? Because he had great wealth? No. Because he didn't want to sell anything? No. He went away because Jesus was calling him away from religion into a relationship.

A relationship built on love and trust in Jesus. You know, we can easily make fun of this young man.

But aren't we somehow guilty of the same thing? If I do X, Y, and Z, then that should be good enough. If I just follow these rules, isn't that good enough?

If I just color within the lines, won't that do? Well, let's go back to the text for today. The question that the Pharisees had asked Jesus was, Which is the greatest commandment in the law?

Matthew 22, verses 37 through 40. This is Jesus speaking. He says, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

[13 : 25] This is the greatest commandment. And the second is just like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. And all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.

You've got to remember, religion is man's attempt to reach God. In Christianity, being a follower of Christ, God is reaching out to us.

And it all centers around love. Love is at the center of Christ's relationship with us. Do you see the difference?

Do you see the difference there? Religion is following the rules. They are often man-made. Being a follower of Christ is being in a relationship with Christ.

Knowing Christ. And this creates a whole new math equation. A whole new math equation for us. So let's go through that.

[14 : 31] Being a follower of Christ equals loving God and loving others. So how do we love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul?

You know, that's a great question to ask, and I'm glad you asked it. So John, chapter 14, verse 15. This is Jesus speaking. He says, Now hold your horses there, Steve-O.

You just said a couple of seconds ago that it wasn't about following rules, right? So why did it change? Why are you going back on that? Well, I'm really not because it's simple.

There must be a set of rules of some kind. God made the rules to protect us. The Ten Commandments to protect us. To protect us from what?

Well, mainly from ourselves. So let's just take a quick peek at two of those commandments, okay? The first one we're going to go over is, You shall not commit adultery.

[15 : 39] Okay? Sounds basic enough. See, it's not a rule to just be followed. It's a rule to protect us. If we allow our sexual desires to go crazy, that opens the door to a whole lot of things.

Disease, illness, shame, guilt, depression. And the list can just go on and on. But God gave us this particular commandment to protect us from sexual sin.

When we are free from sexual sin, we can then fully enjoy our relationships with our spouse. The second one we'll look at.

Thou shall not covet. Or you should not covet. We've got King James there for a second. That means wanting and desiring something that doesn't belong to you.

It belongs to someone else. When we covet, we are never satisfied. We never have enough money. We never have the biggest car. We never have the fanciest house.

[16 : 40] My spouse is not the best looking out there. We're never satisfied with anything or anyone. So do you see how that can go really, really bad quick?

But if you're satisfied with what you have been blessed with, then you can say, God, thank you for meeting all my needs and giving me everything that I need.

You see, God loves you enough to provide rules for living, rules to protect us, to keep us from harm, and to keep us on track. Rules that allow us to live up to our God-given potential, not to confine us or to hold us back.

You know, I think I would much rather have God make the rules for me than for me to make my own rules. Okay, so do you remember, for those of you who have had kids, remember when your kids were young?

Would you have allowed them to make their own rules? Well, absolutely not. Why? Because they don't know what's good for them. You know, they may say, you know, I'm going to have gummy bears for all my meals and all my snacks because I love them and that's all I'm going to do.

[17 : 55] Or taking a bath is no fun, so I'm never taking a bath again. And maybe even let's take it one step farther. I'm not going to brush my teeth anymore because it's terrible.

And you know what? I'm going to take all my buddies and we're going to go play out in the middle of the street. No. No. We have rules to protect them. We as parents make rules for them to protect them.

We have, don't play with matches. You know, don't go and eat five gallons of ice cream at one time just because you think it tastes great. You know, don't grab onto an electric fence. I think we would all agree that these are all good rules.

Rules to keep our children safe. And that's why we put them into place. And as adults, we need these kind of rules too.

But if we follow and love Jesus, we follow the rules for a different reason. We follow them because we love Jesus and we know that these rules are for our benefit.

[19 : 00] not to hold us back, but quite the opposite, to free us to do God's will and to be all that God has called us to be.

And if we don't follow, if we don't follow these rules out of obligation so that we can go down and check them all off the list, but we follow them out of a love for Jesus.

We follow those rules because we know that it pleases Jesus and we do it out of obedience. And like we said earlier, love is at the center of every relationship with God.

Any relationship that God is in is because of love. And that love was extended to us long ago. Paul tells us in Romans chapter five, verse eight, but God demonstrates his own love towards us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Do you hear that? While I was still a sinner, when I was still in my sinful life, doing all my dumb sinful things, Christ died for me.

[20 : 09] When you were doing all those sinful things and living a sinful life, Christ died for you. You know, we often hear this verse so many times, we recite it all the time.

John 3, 16. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

You know, love is the fundamental character of any godly relationship. God's relationship with us begins with his love for us.

And because of his love for us, then we can go and love him back and also love those around us. So how else can we love God?

Well, giving God praise. When we sing our praise hymns, we just sing to God and we're speaking and singing from our heart, not just Christian karaoke, it's singing from our hearts and praying.

[21 : 15] Praying is a conversation with God. We talk to him during that time and he talks with us. And then reading the Bible. The Bible is God's love letter to us.

How can we learn about God? One, by reading his word. And also by tithing. By remembering what God is the source of everything in our lives.

And then fasting. Setting aside specific times to being particularly close with God. And having hope. Trusting in God that we are never walking through life alone.

And then the last one is loving others. 1 John 4, verses 10-12 says, This is how we know that God loved.

Not that we love God first, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

[22 : 18] No one has ever seen God. But if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

So love your neighbor as yourself. I think we are good at loving those that we want to. Why? Because it's easy.

It's easy to love those people. Now I'm not saying it's not always easy. Sometimes we know we have our differences. Sometimes it's hard to love our kids. Sometimes it's hard to love our spouse and our parents and our siblings.

And maybe even a few select friends that we consider close friends. You know, and that's all well and good. But Jesus said to love more than just family and friends.

Jesus said, love your neighbor as yourself. So that begs the question, who is my neighbor?

[23 : 21] Who's my neighbor? And that's a good question. And Jesus answered that question in Luke, the 10th chapter. It's a story often referred to as the Good Samaritan. And I'm sure that at some point or another we've all heard it.

So to summarize the story, our neighbors are everyone and anyone that we have an encounter with. Everyone and anyone.

People you may like and then sometime it's not going to be. People you may like, that's okay, this is easy. Our family, our friends, our church family, sometimes some of our coworkers, you know, people that we play on sports teams with.

You know, we're with them for a reason. But then also it's God's calling us to love those people that we may not like. Okay? Like maybe IU fans.

Or calling us to like Purdue fans. People at the checkout and Walmart. People that believe differently than we do. And most importantly, to love our enemies.

[24 : 34] Can loving your enemy make a difference? Can the love that you show someone that you consider an enemy, can that make a difference? And I'm going to say it absolutely does.

Because you need to hear this story of a fellow by the name of Daryl Davis. Daryl Davis is a blues musician. But he also had what some might consider an interesting hobby.

For the last 30 years, Davis, who's a black man, has spent time befriending members of the Ku Klux Klan. Can you see that?

He says that once the friendship begins to blossom, the Klansmen realize that their hate must be misguided. misguided. Since Davis started talking with these members of the Klan, over the years, over 200 Klansmen have given up their robes.

And when that happens, Davis collects those robes and keeps them in his home as a reminder of the dent he has made in the racism by showing and sitting down with people of difference.

[25 : 50] Can you imagine that? Love, well you know, love changes everything. God's love made a change in my life.

And God's love can make a change in your life. God's love has made an eternal difference in my life and yours too. God's love offered us salvation, a substitute for our sins.

God's love offers me a life right now and right here walking with him every day. And God wants a relationship with each and every one of us.

He wants a relationship with me and he wants a relationship with you. And because of your, of our love for God, how could that change the lives around us?

So in the end, a relationship with Christ is greater than our religion.

[26 : 52] thank you so much for joining us today. And I pray that you, that these words have touched your heart.

That God and Jesus and having a relationship with Jesus is so much more than following rules. It's drawing close to him in such an intimate way. Because that's what Christ wants.

He wants to know you. He wants you to know him because he's got a great plan for you. Let's pray together. God, I thank you for your word today. I thank you for loving us in such an incredible way.

And because of your love that we just turn around and love you back by obeying you and loving our neighbors. God, we thank you for today.

We thank you for your word. And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I hope this message has touched your heart today. And if you have questions, I pray that you would just give us a call here at the First Christian Church in Greensburg, 812-663-8488.

[28 : 02] If you haven't found a church home yet, I pray that you would just give us an opportunity. Come visit us. Our services are Sunday mornings at 8 o'clock, 9, 30, and 11.

And you can find us on the web at www.fccgreensburg.com. Thank you again for joining us. May God bless you.