

YOU'RE
NOT
FAR

Week 4: Loophole Religion

From an early age, we learn quickly to look for loopholes in the rules. We try to figure out what we can get away with and still be okay. We tend to take this same mindset into our relationship with God, but it doesn't work. When we opt for loopholes and workarounds, we find ourselves in a category no one wants to be in: hypocrites. Jesus calls us to move beyond loophole religion.

Discussion Questions

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. **Read Mark 7:1–15.**
 - What stands out to you?
 - Jesus accused religious leaders of nullifying the intent of God's commands with made-up traditions. Can you think of any modern-day examples of this?
4. Are there any ways you have let go of the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions? Do you identify with any of the following? If so, how?
 - Do you ever try to figure out how close you can get to sin without sinning?
 - Do you believe there is a ritual that makes you right with God while removing your responsibility to make things right with others?
 - Do you feel guiltier about missing church than mistreating someone at work (or home, school, or in your community)?
 - Are you banking on the myth that God has short-term memory loss?

Changing Your Mind

Loophole religion is pervasive in our culture, but following Jesus is an invitation to be done with all the games and traditions. We are part of a kingdom of conscience informed by the law of Christ: to love others as God through Christ has loved us. There are no loopholes in that kind of love—no workarounds. In this kingdom, we wake up every day with the question:

What does love require of me?

The kingdom of God is near, and everyone is invited to participate.