

# CHRISTIAN

## It's Not What You Think By Andy Stanley

### Session 7 Loopholes

We all like loopholes. They're our way of getting around rules or laws.

Looking for them comes naturally; nobody has to teach us. We're always searching for them.

Christians love loopholes, as all religious people do. Every religion has a book or a list, and every religion has theologians to help people get around actually doing the stuff written in those books or those lists. Religion gives you a belief system that you don't really follow; when it gets really difficult, you find a loophole.

Loophole Christians really love theology. Theology is where we build the barricades that keep us from having to do what the Bible actually says. All kinds of horrible things have happened in the name of theology.

But the truth is, when you're a follower of Jesus, you quit searching for loopholes. And you start looking for something else. You start asking a completely different set of questions.

In a conversation Jesus had with some experts on loopholes, we discover something that should make us rethink our whole approach to Christianity as it relates to these things.

#### DISCUSSION STARTER

What are some of the loopholes you've seen other people come up with and take advantage of? Did their reasoning behind this strike you as clever, humorous, aggravating—or something else?

And how about you? What loopholes have you found yourself looking for and making use of?

#### VIDEO OVERVIEW

For Session 7 of the Video

Jesus doesn't like it when we use his Father's words to avoid doing his Father's will.

We all do this when we ignore the truths in the Bible we find inconvenient. We make lists, but our lists never fully match the lists in the Bible. We pick and choose.

Jesus pushed back against this. He takes us back to what God first had in mind when he gave his commandments in Scripture.

This was in his thinking as he told his disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another" (John 13:34). He knew God wanted this to be primary. Then Jesus added, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

More than twenty years later, Paul echoed this as he wrote to the Jesus followers in Rome: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). In other words, we should pay our debts—but this debt of loving one another is one we can never pay off. We owe it to the people around us to love them, because we owe it to our heavenly Father in light of how much he loves us.

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Paul went on to say that all the commands in the Old Testament “are summed up in this one command: ...<sup>2</sup> “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:9).

This is what Jesus taught as well. The religious leaders asked him, “What’s the greatest command?” He responded, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” Then he added, “The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30–31). He was saying that everything else is secondary.

Loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself—this is the filter through which we’re to make every decision. The rest of Scripture is simply commentary on how to love in this way.

Disciples of Jesus use the Scriptures as a mirror. Each day they ask, “What does love require of me?” Not simply, “What does the Bible say?”

Living and loving this way is much harder and more complicated than being a loophole Christian. We reach out toward people we don’t like, because that’s what Jesus did. This can lead us into uncomfortable places and new kinds of relationships.

This approach has nothing to do with abandoning your faith or compromising. It has everything to do with looking at others and asking yourself, “What does love require of me?”

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are we so eager to find loopholes—especially religious loopholes?
2. How do Christians manufacture extra rules in order to preserve their own comforts or biases?
3. How would you describe your view of theology? Do you see theology as helpful or harmful?
4. How can you tell if you’re more in love with the commands in the Bible than with the Commander?
5. Are you convinced that Jesus understood his Father’s intentions as written in the Bible? Why or why not?
6. How would you answer the question, “What does love require of me?”

### MILEPOSTS

- We naturally love loopholes as a way of escaping God’s requirements that we find uncomfortable, and we base these loopholes on the Bible.
- But Jesus doesn’t like it when we use his Father’s words to avoid doing his Father’s will.
- Loving God and loving others is to be our filter for rightly guiding every situation in life. We’re to always ask, “What does love require of me?”

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#### MOVING FORWARD

What does it mean practically for you to be a debtor to other people, to owe them the continuing debt of love, according to Romans 13:8? Is this a new way of thinking for you? What will help you remember this obligation toward others in your daily life?

#### CHANGING YOUR MIND

Let these words from Paul remind you of how strongly we owe it to God and to others to extend love to everyone:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8

#### PREPARATION FOR SESSION 8

To help you prepare for Session 8, use these suggested devotions during the week leading up to your small group meeting.

##### Day One

Turn today to Matthew 22:37–40, which is another account of a passage we looked at last week (Mark 12:28–34). Notice especially verse 40. What do you find most significant in this verse? What do you think Jesus wants us to understand most from his words here?

##### Day Two

To help review and reinforce where we've been in these sessions, look at Acts 11:26. What new understanding do you have of this passage?

##### Day Three

Look today at Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16. Together with yesterday's verse, these passages represent the three places the word "Christian" is used in the Bible. Taken together, what do they tell us about this word?

##### Day Four

Today, reflect on the way the word "disciple" is used in Acts 6:7, 9:26, and 9:36. What new understanding do you have of this word?

##### Day Five

Finally, turn once more to the crucial statement in John 13:34–35. What new understanding do you have of these profound words of Jesus?

#### Last Session

We all love loopholes, especially religious loopholes that we attach to some Scripture passage, allowing us to appear more obedient to God than we really are. But disciples of Jesus do not look for such loopholes. They recognize the higher challenge of the love their Lord calls them to as their greatest pursuit. Each day, in every aspect of life, they learn to ask, "What does love require of me?"