

Not a Fan: Following Rules or Following Jesus?
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Introduction

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his followers, “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees have the authority to tell you what the law of Moses says. So you should obey and follow whatever they tell you, but their lives are not good examples for you to follow. They tell you to do things, but they themselves don’t do them. They make strict rules and try to force people to obey them, but they are unwilling to help those who struggle under the weight of their rules. (Matthew 23:1-4 NCV)

We shouldn’t have to convince others that we love Jesus by following a strict set of rules. The way we live our lives should be proof enough of where our devotion lies. That is not to say rules aren’t important, but they must reside in hearts tempered by love. So what does Jesus have to say to those who consider themselves followers because of their religious rule keeping? What we are going to discover is that such persons are not completely committed followers of Jesus at all. They are, instead, just fans or “enthusiastic admirers” of Christ. So what separates fans from followers?

Digging Deeper

A fan focuses on the OUTSIDE, but a follower focuses on the INSIDE.

- Do you find yourself doing things just so people will think you’re “good”? How can that end up being detrimental to everyone involved? How can you gain the discernment needed to distinguish between people pleasing and God pleasing?
- What you see isn’t always what you get. Have you ever felt disillusioned by someone you thought was on the right track, but their actions (or lack thereof) spoke otherwise? How did you handle it? While people disappoint, God always delivers. How would you be able to recognize if an outward focus was darkening the light He placed inside of you?

A fan emphasizes LAWS, but a follower emphasizes LOVE.

- Read 1 Corinthians 13. Laws are made to prevent problems. Love solves problems. Have you ever read verses 4-8 of this passage and replaced the references to love with the name of Jesus? It’s the only name that can be used to represent all of these things. His name is greater and He IS love.
- Read Proverbs 4:23. The things we think, say and do are all driven by the condition of our heart. So how do you perform a heart check? Would you say you sometimes miss the forest for the trees (so to speak) in terms of how you handle certain situations?
- Read Galatians 3:23-25 (NLT). The loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ removed any need to keep a strict set of laws. If we could only abide by His simple directive to love God and others as we love ourselves, all the sins that the laws were created to prevent would naturally be eradicated. What do you think is the hardest part about loving others as we love ourselves?

A fan is weighed down by GUILT, but a follower is freed by GRACE.

- Fans are about the “do,” but followers celebrate the “done”. Fans who try to do are weighed down by guilt because they can never do enough. Followers are freed by grace because Jesus has already done enough. How do you reconcile feelings of guilt with the knowledge that your sins were forgiven on the cross?
- Read Romans 7:24-25. What helps you resist when you are battling the urge to do something you know is wrong? If you are not able to resist, what gets you out of the funk created by guilt and self-condemnation?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you are getting to know someone, and way down deep inside you say, “I hope they don’t find out this about me?” Fortunately, we don’t have to worry about this with God. He already knows all about us and when we give ourselves fully to Him, He combines our good and bad parts to make us whole again. How can complete transparency with even just one person help us get closer to releasing our guilt and fully accepting God’s grace?

A fan clings to RELIGION, but a follower cultivates a RELATIONSHIP.

- Have you ever heard someone say, “I love Jesus, but I hate religion?” What would you say are the main reasons religion has always gotten such a bad rap? What needs to be done to begin to reverse the narrative on this subject?
- Jesus taught that life is all about relationships – with God, with others, with ourselves. God’s grace pours out love, kindness and favor to all who will trust Him. You don’t have to earn it. You just have to be in relationship with Him to receive it. “Do you know Jesus?” Chances are someone has asked you this in your lifetime and you’ve undoubtedly replied, “Why, yes I do!” But do you really? Is there a relationship there beyond Sunday mornings? Name something you will do this week to start cultivating a deeper relationship with God.

Conclusion

There are many Biblical examples that not only show Jesus setting religious rules aside to do the right thing, but also tell us that more than anything else we are supposed to love God and one another. So the question we need to ask ourselves is, “Are we following rules or Jesus?”