



**WHEN “RELIGION”
CLOUDS-OVER & CHOKES-OUT
The WAY OF AGAPE-LOVE TAUGHT by JESUS**
Sid Galloway BS, M.DIV. - updated 4-2-23



WHY DON'T CHRISTIANS LOOK & SOUND LIKE JESUS?

As a boy and a young man, I rejected the *religion* of “Christianity” *because* of the “Christians” I saw, especially those out in public, and even some of the religious *leaders* in the “church”. Many of the traditional teachings I heard painted a picture of God that looked like the opposite of Jesus. They taught and modeled a type of “religion” with a kind of “God” who looked like a critical hateful, angry, vengeful person whose main desire was to criticize, judge, and punish me. I did *not* see, hear, or feel from them a *clear* message about the loving God that Jesus actually described and modeled by his life. Jesus said that followers of the “Way” have one *main* job – to LOVE as he loved!

“You have **heard** it was said,
'Love you neighbor and **hate your enemy**.”
“**But I say** to you, **Love** your enemies, ...
do good to those that hate you!”
“A new command I give you: **Love** ...
.... **As I have loved** you, so you **must love**....
By this everyone **will know** that you are **my disciples**,
if you love one another.” - JESUS

I’m talking about the Jesus who *loved, embraced, comforted, and hung-out* with the poor, the outcasts, the underprivileged, the racially rejected, the refugees, the oppressed, prostitutes, drunkards, and lepers. I’m talking about the Jesus who *opposed and exposed* the religious power-players who abused their positions, privileges, and profits to oppress those “under” their authority.

WHY DO MANY PEOPLE REJECT “CHRISTIANITY”?

The *simplistic* and *wrong* answer many pastors give is, “*Because people don’t want the truth*”. But, the real “truth” is that most of the people I’ve met who say they *reject* “religion”, especially “Christianity”, have actually said they *respect* the *love-centered* life and teachings of Jesus. So, what is it they reject? It’s many of the other “things” (*beliefs and practices*) that were added *after* and on top of Jesus’s teachings. [Don’t panic, Christian friends.] Please, just keep reading to find out what I mean. And, to discover what *they* are trying to tell you, if you’ll listen with a humble open heart of love.

“. . . for, between the Christianity of **this land**,
and the Christianity of **Christ**,
I recognize the **widest** possible **difference** –
so wide, that to **receive** the **one** as **good**, pure, and holy,

is of necessity to **reject** the **other** as **bad**, corrupt, and wicked.
To be the friend of the one, is of necessity
to be the enemy of the other.
I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial
Christianity of Christ”

Frederick Douglass – former slave
& friend of Abraham Lincoln

NOT ALL OF YOU CAN BE RIGHT

Over the past decades as a counselor (*including counseling plenty of pastors/church staff*), plus serving as a conflict-mediator for lots of churches, Christian organizations, and numerous denominations, I’ve seen and heard countless *very different* added extra perspectives and interpretations about nearly every *religious* doctrine or practice. Since so many of those *different* groups *disagree* on their varied extras, they cannot *all* be correct.

“Dear friends, let us love one another,
for love comes from God.
Everyone who loves has been born of God
and knows God.
Whoever does not love does not know God,
because God is love.”

JOHN, the best friend of Jesus
(*First John 4:7-8*)

SO, SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR EVERYONE

- Wasn’t Jesus’s goal to teach us how to have a vital “relationship” with the Creator of the Cosmos, the very *Source* of Love, *not* how to start another “religion”?
- And wasn’t Jesus’s goal *also* to show the “way” to fulfilling overflowing love-trust “relationships” with one another?
- So, how *important* are all those extra things *added* onto Jesus’s direct teachings over the past centuries?
- Are those extras really *necessary*, for a person to be *connected* to the Creator of Love?
- And are those extras *necessary* to *grow* in love and build growing relationships with others?
- What about all the people in *history* & across the *world* who *never* had a chance to hear all that “extra” stuff, or even to hear about the *direct* teachings of Jesus?

WHEN “RELIGION” BECOMES A PROBLEM

It’s vital that followers of Jesus address a *serious* problem in “Christianity”. The problem is when “religion” *damages* “relationships”, with God and with other people. All of us,

and our “churches”, over time, naturally *tend* to allow peripheral, *non-essential*, *different* beliefs and practices (*many that are possibly wrong*) **cloud-over** and **choke-out** the central simple **heart** of Jesus’s message - his “Way” of Agape (Love). Remember that “**agape**” is the Greek term representing the highest human value or virtue. It means a pure unselfish, self-giving, other-serving love that will sacrifice self to save another person’s life - not just family or friends - but even to serve and rescue an “enemy” (*Matthew 5:43-48*). Agape is not a fickle feeling that people fall in or out of. It’s a strong, stable *commitment* to learn, live, give, and *serve* others. It’s a decision to delay or deny some of our own “desires” in order to meet the “needs” of others who are struggling and suffering. It’s the way of living *simply*, so that others in *need* can “simply live”. The Way of Agape is a love-*relationship*, not a “religion”.

“Everybody knows that love is the greatest thing in the world, and Christians know why. It is because God is love. The meaning of agape love is the sacrifice of oneself in the service of others.”

**Dr. John Stott, The Radical Disciple:
Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling.**

SUB-CULTURES CAN BECOME “CULT”-LIKE & CRUEL

Psycho-socially every human group becomes a sub-culture. This can be *positive*, providing a sense of belonging, mutual support in times of need, accountability toward growth in love, etc.. But “cultures” can also become *negatively* “cult”-like, when pride becomes *prejudice*, assuming “WE” are more *valuable* than “THEM”. Empathy and *compassion* fade, degenerating to: “Others are bad”. Group-think becomes defensive, fearful, “self”-protective, verbally attacking “others”, even violent. “Others” are seen as *enemies*. Money, buildings, & budgets can *fuel* this cycle *unconsciously*. All of it is the *opposite* of Jesus’s teaching!

JESUS’S FOLLOWERS WERE NOT “CHRISTIANS”

The first followers of Jesus did not call themselves “Christians”. The word “Christian” was a *negative* derogatory term invented by the Roman and Jewish leaders to mock them. Now sadly, in current times, so many “Christians” representing “Christianity” (*yes, me too*) have made the label *justifiably* negative! We’ve portrayed a politicized, commercialized, *selfie*-centered form of “Christianity” that does *not* look or sound like “Christ”. Often the false pictures of God that our religions have portrayed are twisted, distorted faces of a Being that *nobody* in their right mind would trust, much less love. What we’ve too often *reflected*, deserves to be *rejected*.

What we’ve presented as “God” is often a graphic psychological *projection* of our own flawed characters.

“And modern psychology is calling on us now to love. But long before modern psychology came into being, the world’s greatest psychologist who walked around the hills of Galilee told us to love. He looked at men and said: ‘**Love your enemies; don’t hate anybody.**’”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr

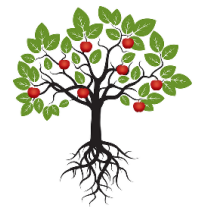
SIMPLY PEOPLE OF THE “WAY”, THE AGAPE-WAY

The first followers of Jesus actually called themselves, followers of “The Way” (*Acts 9:1-2; Acts 19:9 & 23; Acts 22:4 & 14*). They identified as followers of a “Way”, a way of life that’s achieved *not* by *prideful* self-righteous religious rules, rituals, and works. It’s the Agape-Way, a love relationship, a love-life, begun and lived simply by *humble* dependence (*faith*) in the amazing *grace* of the Creator of Love. A way to receive and achieve three vital things:

- *forgiveness* of our selfishness (anti-agape),
- *growth* in unselfish other-serving agape love,
- *transformation* into pure love after death. (*The Greek NT term for transformation = metamorphosis, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18*)

THE PROFOUNDLY SIMPLE WAY OF THE FRUIT-VINE

It’s the simple way a fruit *branch* depends on the fruit *vine* to produce *good* fruit (*John 15:1-17*). The branch simply yields and surrenders to the vine as the Source of life needed to produce good fruit. The rivers of liquid “sap” flowing to and through the branch are analogous to the “Spirit” of Love that flows from the Creator Source through followers of the Way (*John 7:37-39*). Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruit” (*Mat 7:16*), and “By your love all people will know you are my followers (*John 13:34-35*).



“Love is the greatest force in the universe. It is the heartbeat of the moral cosmos. He who loves is a participant in the being of God.”
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr

BE THE LOVE THAT CHANGES LIVES

As a boy growing up, two beautiful, *powerful* spiritual mentors (*my substitute surrogate “black” grandfather Mr. Will, and my “black” aunt Mrs. Jerline*), modeled and *proved* for me two truths: Agape-Love is *real*. And, it’s the *Way* to fix the central problems in individuals, families, nations, and the world.
Thank you Mr. Will & Mrs. Jerline!

