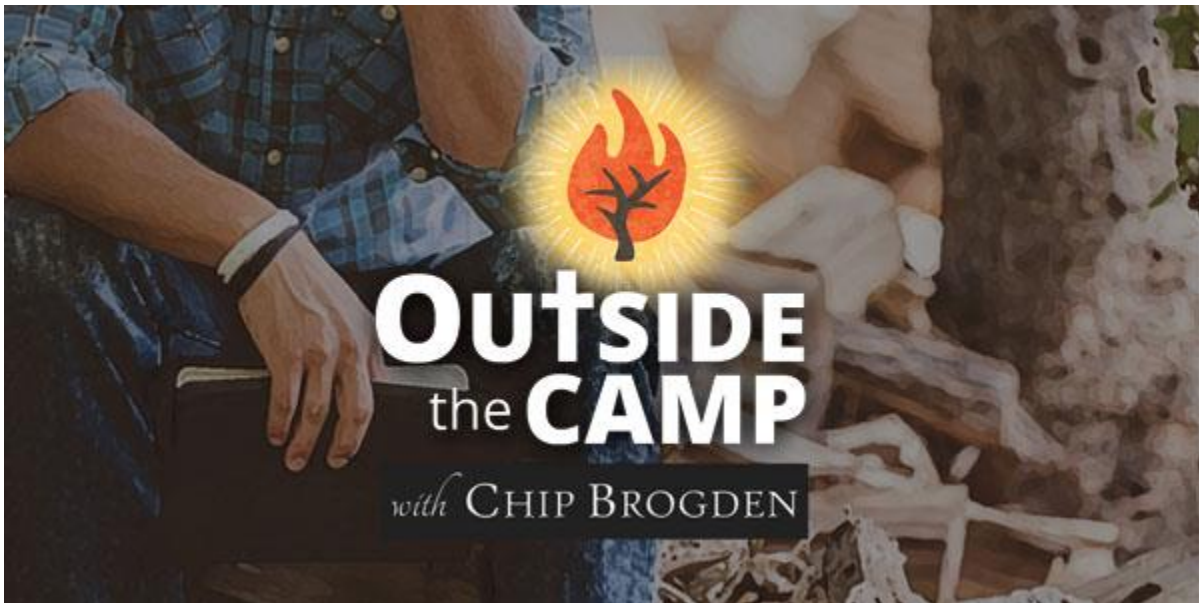


TRANSCRIPT

OUTSIDE THE CAMP WITH CHIP BROGDEN



EPISODE 3: Religion vs. Relationship

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ANNOUNCER: Welcome to this edition of Outside the Camp with author and teacher Chip Brogden. Helping you discover the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion. And now, with today's message, here's Chip Brogden.

CHIP: What is the difference between religion and relationship? I think it's something we need to seriously consider. You know, I use that word *relationship* quite a bit, and I think most people assume that having a relationship with God, and being religious, is just about the same thing. 9 out of 10 church people, if you ask them if they have a relationship with God, will say, "Well yeah, of course I have a relationship with God."

That's why I go to church once, twice, three times a week." And if you ever get a chance to talk about *your* relationship with God, they will look at you funny and say (either to themselves or sometimes out loud), "How can you have a relationship with God if you don't even go to church?" So you see, I don't think people have the right appreciation for the difference between religion and relationship.

Same thing with the Body of Christ. When church folks realize you don't go to church, they say, "What's wrong with you? Don't you love God's people?" In other words, how can you have a relationship with God's people if you don't go to church? And the fact of the matter is, of course, I think most people who love God also love God's people. But I think we would have to dig down more deeply into this idea of "loving God's people." What does it mean? When someone goes to church, is it because they are really loving God's people, or are they just loving themselves? Are they motivated by a spiritual concern or by a social or psychological concern? In other words, are they really pursuing a love relationship with God and with God's people, or are they just going through the motions of religion?

I love God, and I love God's people. That's why I hate the religious system that keeps God's people in bondage. I hate that a religion *about* Jesus keeps getting in the way of a relationship *with* Jesus. I want everyone, everywhere to experience the freedom and the joy of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion. Meaning, not just another religious relationship pretending to be love, but a real relationship. A real relationship with God, and a real relationship with God's people. Based on Christ, not based on church.

What's the difference? Well, that's easy. If the relationship is based on Christ then it makes no difference to the relationship whether you attend the same church. You can go to their church, or go to a different church, or not go to church at all, and if the

relationship is based on Christ then it continues on, regardless of church. But if it is based on church, then it only lasts so long as you keep going to church. Everything is wonderful and great and delightful; the people are warm and friendly and we often mistake that as “love,” don’t we? We think we have really wonderful fellowship because the people we are meeting are so nice and kind. But what happens if you stop going? Worse, what happens if you explain to them that Jesus is calling you to go outside the camp to be with Him? You might even say, “Look: I still love God, I still love you, but I’m not going to church anymore, I won’t be coming back to any of the meetings!” What will happen? All of a sudden, the relationship changes. You know how it changes. You might even try to maintain those relationships apart from meeting together, and that’s when you realize that everything has changed. All those people who said they loved God and loved you no longer want anything to do with you.

Of course, I’m speaking generally, OK? But I have heard these stories long enough, and from enough people, to know that what I am describing is not out of the ordinary, but it is common. I think it shows us a few things. First, it shows that all the talk about loving God and loving God’s people is just a lot of talk; what people really love is going to church, and it’s a self-centered love, not Christ-centered or people-centered love. Meaning, the easiest thing in the world is to love people who believe and behave like you do. To love those who fit in to your little group is not that amazing, and to shun those who stop attending is just plain carnal and worldly. Second, it shows that you aren’t missing all that much. People who come out of church sometimes complain about how they miss all the fellowship and friendships and relationships they had with people they used to go to church with. Here’s a question for you: why are you missing them? Where are all those friendships and relationships you said you had? Do you mean to tell me that you don’t have those friendships and relationship anymore? Why is that? Do you mean to say that those friendship and relationships aren’t there anymore because you don’t go to church with them? Then that must mean that *church* is the only thing you

had in common; and if that's the case, then it wasn't really based on Christ at all, was it? And if the friendships and relationships and all the fellowship you think you had in church died the moment you stopped going, what does that say about the quality of your friends? Are they real friends? Are they real relationships? If so, where are they now?

I've seen and heard of countless cases where couples have been friends for more than twenty years – best friends – and one couple stops attending church, and the other couple stops being friends. Just like that! I think people have this “fellowship fantasy” in their mind; they imagine that they have all this wonderful fellowship and all these beautiful Christian friends that are so in love with one another, and they can't possibly give all that up and follow Jesus outside the camp. What I have learned is this: if they really *are* your friends then they will continue to *be* your friends, whether you go to church or not; and if not, then it just shows that they don't have a relationship at all, they just have a religion.

Then again... maybe they aren't alone. Maybe *you* just have a religion. What's the difference between a religion *about* Jesus and a relationship *with* Jesus? Do you even know the difference? Well, outwardly speaking, the two can look very similar. A relationship, any kind of relationship, is based on mutual commitment and mutual responsibility – two words that are not very popular today. People are very reluctant to be committed to anything. This is why they want to live together before they get married, and then maybe just live together and not be married at all. We are a people of dabblers, we like to try things out and feel free to walk away if we don't like it, if it doesn't make us feel good. I'll try this job, I'll try this class, I'll try this church, I'll try this movie, I'll try this relationship, I'll try this guy or this gal, I'll try this and that, and if I like it I'll keep doing it, but as soon as it stops being fun, as soon as there might be a little bit of work involved, I'm out of here. No commitment.

And right along with that is responsibility. No one wants to take responsibility for anything. This has been a problem since the Garden of Eden. When God asked Adam for an explanation as to why he had disobeyed, Adam took no responsibility. He did what most husbands do – he blamed his wife, and in the same breath, he blamed God. He said, “The woman that YOU gave me – she’s the one who gave me the fruit to eat. It’s her fault; and You gave her to me, so it’s really Your fault, too!” So ever since, men and women have blamed each other for all their problems. No one wants to take responsibility, and this is why relationships fail.

It doesn’t matter what the relationship is – your relationship with your spouse, your relationship with your family and friends, your relationship with your employer or with your customers, or even your relationship with God – if they are going to work, it will be because there is a sense of mutual commitment and mutual responsibility. When they don’t work, it’s because there is a failure on the part of at least one side to be committed and responsible – in other words, to keep their promises and do what they are supposed to do. Think about all your relationships and see if that isn’t so.

Now think about how this applies to religion and relationship. The two look very similar. What does religion ask you to commit to? The church. Yes, I know they make it sound like you are committing yourself to Jesus, but again, if that were the case, then church attendance would not be a factor. The reason church attendance matters is because that shows your *commitment*. See how it works? If you are committed to God then you are supposed to be committed to the church, and that means they want you to settle down and become a member; they don’t want you hopping around to different churches every week. I mean, that’s not a bad idea in and of itself. If you really *love* God’s people, why not go around and fellowship with *all* of God’s people? Why limit yourself to the same small group of God’s people once, twice, three times a week? Play the field! Get out there, visit all the 40,000 different denominations, pick a new place to go every week

and you'll never run out of different churches to attend. Oh no, people don't do that, and the pastor certainly doesn't want that, because they want you to get plugged in, get committed, get faithful to *them* and *their* ministry and *their* work and *their* church. It cannot survive otherwise.

Then, let's be clear: for the church relationship to work, you have to take responsibility as a member of the church or group you are committed to. You have to show up every week, and of course, pay your tithes and offerings and submit to the spiritual leadership. When you do, you are fulfilling not just your responsibility to the church, but you are fulfilling your responsibility to *God*. At least, that's the leverage they use with people to make the whole religious system work. They have to make you believe that to cooperate with them is to cooperate with God; conversely, to rebel against the church system or the church leaders is to rebel against God.

Isn't it amazing how that works? So what I have described is a "relationship" but it is a sick, twisted, dysfunctional, unhealthy, abusive relationship that brings God's people into bondage. So how do we tell the difference between a religion *about* Jesus and a relationship *with* Jesus? For me, it comes down to the other part of that equation: freedom and joy. There is freedom and joy in a Christ-centered faith, and there is no freedom and joy in religion. Religion is based on obligation, not freedom; on fear, not joy. Yes, people can seem to be very happy in religion – until their belief system is threatened, and then you see them turn very ugly and defensive.

Many people actually prefer comfortable bondage to uncomfortable freedom. So we must not mistake the comfortable, happy, self-satisfied feeling of religion with the true joy and peace of the Holy Spirit, which is the fruit of a Christ-centered faith. Comfortable bondage is not freedom. Freedom and joy only comes when we have a deep, enduring, abiding relationship with Jesus that transcends religion and church.

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People will sometimes say to me, “God called me out of church, now I’ve learned a few things from you, and God’s telling me I need to go back to church, love people where they are, and show them these things.” It’s interesting to me how the same pattern repeats itself. It is very predictable. What happens is this: people get lonely outside of church, they miss the old fellowship and friendship they thought they had, and before you know it, they believe God is calling them to go right back into something that not too long ago they believed God had called them out of. Now, maybe He is. Maybe He is. Maybe there is some exception, and everyone wants to be the exception to the rule. But in my experience, these attempts to go back and “help” everyone else are really misguided.

There are plenty of people out in the world, outside of church already, way more outside than inside, so why don’t you have a heart to go share with them the truth and simplicity of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion? Why are you trying to convince religious people not to be religious? Wouldn’t it be easier to go to your unchurched, non-religious people you know and help them see Jesus for Who He really is? Why doesn’t God ever lead anyone *there*, instead of always leading people back to church?

I’ll tell you why. It’s not *God* leading them back, it’s *them* going back and rationalizing it. They have a big, empty hole where church used to be and they are itching to have that hole filled. Now, you may fill it with a house church, a home group, or something else, but it’s all the same thing. You haven’t quite learned what it means to walk with Jesus *outside the camp* and bear His reproach. You haven’t quite learned what it means to be *reduced* to Christ, to have nothing but Him. You’re still clinging to the old ways, walking

the familiar paths, and it's really scary to go outside your experience and follow Jesus into a spiritual desert, especially if you've been going to church for most of your life.

And if you've ever been in the ministry, as I have, and try to leave it, it becomes even more difficult. My wife and I were talking the other day about how coming out of the ministry is so much harder than coming out of church. I came out of church in 1999, but coming out of the ministry is an ongoing process. And what I mean is the ministry mindset – I do not mean the genuine, Spirit-filled, Spirit-led ministry of pointing people to Jesus, whether it is writing or teaching or helping or praying or giving or whatever it is God has called you to do. Or, how about just being a butcher, baker, candlestick maker, plumber, lawyer, or whatever it is God has called you to do and just let your life shine where you are? There is a ministry mindset that you learn as a pastor in the Institutional Church. It is very hard for former pastors, preachers, teachers, or leaders in the religious system to come out of that system and just “be” with Jesus for a while, without constantly trying to think about the next ministry they are going to start. They come out of church and no sooner have they shaken the dust of their old ministry off their feet before they are dreaming about a new one. It may be a new and different way of doing church, it may be a house church, it may a home group, or leading a Bible study. I'm not saying all of these things are wrong to do. I'm saying who is doing them? Is Jesus doing them, or are you doing them?

Can you go for a year or two without a thought about starting, organizing, building, or doing something for Him? Can you? If you can then there is hope. Maybe you will get that ministry mindset out of your head and learn how to be a good brother or sister and just love people and point them to Jesus without trying to build something. If not, then there is a very good chance that you will just start up yet another religious thing, something that only perpetuates the same old habits and biases and perceptions that you always had. Nothing new here, you're just doing what you have always done.

What I would like to emphasize is that it takes time to unlearn what you have learned, to be deprogrammed, to be emptied, to be truly set free from religion, before you can experience the freedom and joy of Christ-centered faith. It's not about you saving the world or helping other people or trying to find fellowship – it's about you finding Jesus, re-discovering Him, seeing Him for Who He really is, walking with Him daily, deepening your relationship with Him, learning that He is not just Enough, but More Than Enough; not just Sufficient, but More Than Sufficient. Learning how to “be” with Him instead of how to “do” for Him.

Those lessons take time to learn, and it takes a long time to get those old religious habits out of your system. But you know what? The process I am describing is actually what the Bible calls *repentance*. Repentance is not just for those really bad sinners who do terrible things. Repentance is about a change of mind, a change of heart, and a change of behavior. It's a revolutionary thing, repentance. And repentance means change, and it means growth. It means letting go of the old ways, the old hang-ups, and changing the way you're going, adopting a new way of thinking, seeing, and relating to the world.

It's a beautiful thing, but it can be scary and uncomfortable. Most people don't like change. As I said, they prefer comfortable bondage to uncomfortable freedom. But if you want to grow beyond spiritual babyhood then change is not only necessary, it is inevitable. The Cloud is moving. The pillar of fire is moving. And if you want to be where God is going, you can't just pitch your tent or build your house (or build a church) and say, “OK God, here I am, come and get me.” God says, “The cloud is moving on, and if you want to be with me where I am, you're going to have follow the cloud.” You're going to have to get up and walk on the water to get to Jesus. You're going to have to take some steps. Jesus didn't say, “I'll follow you,” He said, “You follow Me!” There is movement. We can't stand still forever. The Path represents making progress, you're

going from beginning to end and there are steps along the way designed to take you from where you are to where God wants you to be. Discipleship is a path. Spiritual growth is a process. Spiritual maturity is progressive.

This is the path we are taking, you and I. A path that leads us out of the spiritual ghetto of Organized Religion as we leave all that behind and go to be with Jesus outside the camp, following Him wherever He may lead us, and discovering the freedom and joy of a Christ-centered faith that is based on relationship, not religion. Until we meet again, I'm Chip Brogden, reminding you that THIS is the day that the Lord has made, so make it a GOOD day; and remember that GREATER is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.

ANNOUNCER: You've been listening to Outside the Camp with author and teacher Chip Brogden. We hope you enjoyed today's broadcast and found it helpful and encouraging. If you'd like to get additional teachings, audio recordings, books and other Christ-centered resources to help you grow spiritually, visit us online at ChipBrogden.com. Outside the Camp is made possible by the prayers and financial support of listeners like you. Until next time, on behalf of Chip Brogden, I'm Kathy Smith, reminding you that you can do all things through Christ Who strengthens you!