



If God Is Love, Don't Be a Jerk: Finding a Faith That Makes Us Better Humans

John Pavlovitz

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John Pavlovitz's *If God Is Love, Don't Be a Jerk* issues a passionate, timely plea for Christians to return to a faith of love and service.

Organized religion has missed the mark, Pavlovitz argues. By implying that white Americans are God's chosen ones and threatening eternal torment for everyone else, Christianity has promoted fear, division, and a concept of God that's too small. Instead, he says, the measure of faith should be whether it makes people kinder and more compassionate: "Not is it true or real or provable or noble—but is it helpful? Is its net effect on humanity redemptive?"

Pavlovitz's witty, self-deprecating stories—as of squeezing into a dusty pair of jeans (glorious and acid-washed), trying not to “step in it” during a conversation at a dog park, and remembering a favorite scene from *This Is Spinal Tap*—make the book relatable and accessible. Even his chapter headings are lively: “Oh, Hell No” critiques assumptions about eternal punishment and original sin; “The Church of Not Being Horrible” suggests a mission statement for a new kind of faith.

The book speaks especially to outsiders who have been disillusioned or wounded by organized religion, and to those who are struggling to find meaning in church doctrines. Focused on healing and putting love to work, the book adopts a progressive approach to LGBTQ+ people and questions about immigration, homelessness, a woman's right to choose, and even mask-wearing during the pandemic.

With conviction and clarity, *If God Is Love, Don't Be a Jerk* advocates a life based on empathy and acceptance in the powerful, earnest voice of “an honest and stumbling disciple trying to find the truest truth and live it.” It's hard to imagine a more urgent and vital message for today's spiritual seekers.

KRISTEN RABE (September / October 2021)

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