

12 Rules by Jordan Peterson reviewed

Jordan Peterson is a clinical psychologist and a professor of psychology. He is very popular among people with more traditional outlooks.

He wrote the bestseller 12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos. It is a self-help book that tries to avoid the pitfalls of this subject by giving sound commonsense advice. God, remarkably, features significantly in this book. Unlike most self-help books, it warns that happiness is hard to hold on to and there are no guarantees. He has been accused of misogyny in his book.

His 12 rules are about not guaranteeing happiness but about putting no obstacles in its way.

His twelve rules have been summarised as

1. Stand up straight with your shoulders back
2. Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping
3. Make friends with people who want the best for you
4. Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today
5. Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them
6. Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world
7. Pursue what is meaningful (not what is expedient)
8. Tell the truth – or, at least, don't lie
9. Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don't
10. Be precise in your speech
11. Do not bother children when they are skateboarding
12. Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street

It is good that God does not occur in this list. But he does emphasise God at times in the book. The emphasis on finding meaning in service to God is erroneous. He says that God's existence cannot be shown to be true but says we must live as if there is a God. That is in fact a call to embrace idolatrous superstition. The only right way to serve a God is by seeing him as real and doing all out of love for him. If he is not real we are wasting our love on him and that is cruel and what about those who emulate us? It is one thing to say you cannot be good without God but another to say you cannot be good without the idea of God. Its a recipe for religious fascism. There is less humility in this than somebody saying, "I know Santa Claus lives on the moon and thinks about me night and day." God by definition is all-love and all important. You cannot truly love God if you use him or the idea of him as a crutch for you cannot do good otherwise. You would end up intolerant of secularism and atheism. The crutch idea of God leads to obscurantism and censorship. If God is just in your head then you create this idol and it says things about you and only you. It is not about you.

The only thing that can be absolutely central is principle. Even God cannot create principle. Religion says his nature is fair and loving in principle and he has not made his nature what it is. If you say morality is just a fiction you are making a moral judgment against anybody who preaches morality and against their moral systems. So principle forces us to think moral. We cannot truly be amoral. This shows there is more to us than fame, fortune and even family and God. Principle is the one thing that is unshakeably true.

What could a Christian think of the book? Rules 3, 6, 9, 10 contradict what the gospels say about Jesus. 2 is better than love your neighbour as yourself but it too contradicts Jesus who was not saying you are to love yourself but that you do love yourself and must love others the same. The command is about others.

5 by the way contradicts how Jesus told the Jews to stone a woman to death for adultery but only if they were worthy - he meant what he said for we are told he was never conniving or trying to manipulate them not to stone her. His statement is approval for the savage laws of the Old Testament which he said was God's unerring word. A spiritual teacher approving things like that needs to be dismissed on the spot instead of Christians trying to excuse it.

The Christian faith spends more time making historical claims than on spiritual stuff. The resurrection of Jesus is central and compared to it the moral teachings of Jesus do not matter. The faith says Jesus rose bodily and transformed from the grave but even the gospels just say the body was not in the tomb and do not comment on why. Visions are not enough to base a resurrection on but that is what we have here.

The gospel writers offer not evidence for the resurrection of Christ but an interpretation they put on what they think happened. Why should we accept theirs for millions of interpretations are possible? They are the ones that say there is only one explanation so it is up to them to refute all the alternatives even if it takes to the end of the millennium so they have no right to our faith. Worse, there is no proof that the accounts are eyewitness accounts. Christians say they are. They seem to think that eyewitness accounts that have been worked over will do. They will not. We don't want something that was edited. We want the original unaltered written accounts and we want assurance that the witnesses checked over them before they were made public. They can't give us any of that.

Faith in somebody's interpretation of a revelation or miracle from God is not the same as faith in the revelation or God. It is not faith in them at all but in the person doing the interpreting.

Peterson has not as yet made any profession of Christian belief. Let us hope that never happens

