

Well, good morning, friends.

We humans, we love our rules. And rules, as the thinking goes, help us live together, to live in, to live in peace. If everyone just has their clear expectations and formula to follow, then it's just on us to stay inside those lines. But still, some of our rules that we've created defy logic. And our friend Tim Thompson down in Bedford is actually preaching on the same passage this morning.

And he went and did some digging and found some rules that are maybe a little bit more bizarre. Okay, so did you know that in Beach Grove, right here in Indiana, it's forbidden to eat watermelon in their park? Don't know how that came about, but it's a rule. In Elkhart, also in Indiana, it's illegal for barbers to threaten to cut off children's ears.

I think I picture some mom or grandma horrified.

South Bend, Indiana, it's illegal to force a monkey to smoke a cigarette.

Alabama, it's illegal to wear a fake mustache that causes laughter in church. I feel like Quentin's already got something up his sleeve. He's planning something for later. Delaware, it's illegal to whisper in church. I think our pentecostal brothers and sisters are saying, whisper.

Why would you want to whisper?

Boston, it's illegal to eat peanuts while in church. Save that for the ball game. Go socks. Have your peanuts there, but not in God's house. In Omaha, it's illegal to sneeze or burp in a church service.

In Texas, it's illegal to go to church in disguise. In New York City, it's illegal to fart in church with the intention of causing a disturbance. Okay, so if you slipped one out on accident, that's one thing. But if you did that thing unintentional. Get out of here.

These are bizarre, right? Nicholas County, West Virginia, no clergy member may tell jokes or humorous stories from the pulpit during church services. I want to know what joke was said that made that law have to go into place. You know what? After last week here, I think we might need to make our own law.

I think that we might need to limit the amount of times we say the word circumcision in a service when there's a bunch of young boys I know, I think it was at the 930 service were here to support their buddy. Who was getting baptized. I don't know that all of them knew what they were being talked about, but I think they were whispering, a couple of them, like, we're here for a what ism. I think they looked a little nervous. Baptism.

Cool it. You're good. Florida no. 1 may carry an ice cream cone in their back pocket if it's a Sunday, Thursday, you're good. Ice cream sandwiches are good.

Front pocket, you're good. But for some reason, that's a rule also in Florida because, well, Florida, a special law prohibits unmarried women from parachuting on Sunday or she shall be at risk of a fine or arrest or even jail time again. What happened that made people think that a law like this was necessary?

What well meaning person thought, you know what? This law will help me and my church and my community better serve God? Last week, we talked a lot about rules and laws, and I don't know, I literally texted Tim after I saw those, and I was like, are these legit? Have you verified these? He says, as far as Google will tell me, those are all legit.

I did look up a couple on my own. It's for real. So last week we looked at the first part of the second chapter of Colossians, right in chapter two, where Paul says, these laws and these rules that you're clinging to, that you're finding security in, even when laws are necessary, they're just shadows. And shadows are notoriously bad at indicating the true nature of something. Sean showed us that video last week of those artists who position their bodies in a certain way, that their bodies formed into words and they told stories.

It led me. I actually googled this week to see how shadow puppets are made. I wanted to learn something myself. And so people online are making, like, crazy stuff like pit bulls and all these intricate things about all I could muster was a bird.

But no matter how good we get at that, it's not really a bird. It's a set of hands.

Last week, we paused right after at verse 17. That's where we wrapped up, which I really like how it said in the passion translation, it says, all of these were but a prophetic shadow, and the evidence of what would be fulfilled for the body is now Christ. And that's where we left off in verse 17. Instead of focusing on the shadow, focus on the reality. What's reality?

Reality is Jesus. Keep your focus on Jesus.

And that was last week, and Sean did a great job leading us through that passage. And now Paul presses in even more with this week's passage, the second half of that chapter, and where in last week's passage, Paul was kind of talking to, largely to Jewish people. Okay, now he turns to the other side of the room. This group known as the Gentiles, this group of people who didn't grow up with a narrative that they were God's chosen people, or that things that were really important were things like purity and holiness and righteousness, or any of this, even like, churchy stuff that wasn't part of their experience. These people were newbies to the party, but guess what?

They'd already found some shadows to focus on, too.

Paul is writing to this group, and he's saying, hey, just like they get bogged down with their legalism, you can't be going and choosing something other than Jesus either. Their brand of

shadows were more like local philosophies, idol worship, spiritual, existential, mystical experiences.

And Paul challenges them in the same way. The more they dig in to know Christ, the less they'll be led into deception. So the invitation is to get to know Christ.

Hey, friends, you might be newer to the party, but what you're looking for will only be found in getting to know Jesus more.

So don't participate in spiritual and religious practices that aren't connected to Jesus. People who latch onto those things, those shadows, instead of the real Jesus. Paul talks to them and talks about them. In verse 19, the second part, he says they're not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.

I don't want to be disconnected from Christ as the head. Christ is the head. He's the keeper of our lives. And as a result, everything in our lives should be filtered through his life. Think about the head.

Like for yourself, think about the head and the important role that so many functions get played and run through that, right? Our sight, we see something, and it gives us an awareness of our surrounding, our eating. We open up our mouths, and we put in food and drink to sustain us. Our hearing, we listen, and what we hear informs us. Our brains, they process all of this and this content, they process it, and then it formulates communication to the rest of our body for what action is needed, our rules or our spiritual experiences?

They might be like arms, okay? They can have a role to play these rules, these spiritual experiences.

But when given precedence over the head, or even worse, not connected to the body that's held together by the head, friends, that's when we've lost our main thing, and that's when we're chasing shadows and not the real thing. So much of what we do and experience physically comes through our head first. So too, everything, everything in our spiritual life is through Christ, the head. So Paul is saying here, look, we need to evaluate things in our life. We're getting sucked into these things over here, these things over here.

We need to evaluate the things in our life. And when something is in our life, we need to ask ourselves, does this increase my affections and my connection to Jesus? Is that happening? Or we ask ourselves this question, does this thing, whatever this thing is that I'm engaged in, does it distract me? Does it increase my desire for the things of the world?

Instead, on Wednesday this past week, we had a double holiday, right? We had Valentine's day and we had ash Wednesday. And for many of us who didn't grow up in a home that practiced, this ash Wednesday is kind of like the first day of Easter season. In my house, we celebrate

November 1. I have a count on my calendar on my phone every year counting down to November 1, because to me, that's the beginning of the holiday season.

I know some of y'all like to wait till, like, thanksgiving or December. I just like more than four weeks of it. And so on November 1, at midnight, I go to my mom and dad's house, and the three of us turn on at midnight the Christmas music. And we listen to Andy Williams sing about how it's the most wonderful time of the year. And my mom's usually already made some of my favorite Christmas cookies.

And we have treats, all of it. I love it. I look forward to that moment every year, and it begins a season of feasting. Similarly, Ash Wednesday kicks off what's called the Lenten season. Lent is a 40 day period of repentance in preparation for Easter.

But instead of feasting, this season is marked more with fasting. It might mean abstaining from eating a particular food like meat or sweets, or even refraining from something like television or social media and focusing more on praying than consumption of some sorts. Some of our more liturgical friends in the room are probably cringing at my comparison here, but the point is, it marks the beginning of a season of anticipation for what's to come, and people will often utilize Lent as a bit of a heart check, asking those questions, does this increase my affections, my connection to Jesus? Or does this distract me and increase my desire for the things of this world?

Paul reminds us of both. It's our invitation, but really for those of us who have taken up Jesus on his offer of salvation and submitted to his lordship, it's also our reality. So Paul reminds us of our invitation and our reality. In verses 20 and 21 said, he says, you have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of this world such as don't handle, don't taste, don't touch.

I love how the passion translation puts this one too says, for you were included in the death of Christ and have died with him to the religious systems and powers of this world. Hey, don't retreat to being back to being bullied. Bullied by the standards and the opinions of religion.

Right. There are strict requirements. Those people that say, hey, you can't associate with that person. Don't eat that, you can't touch that. Friends.

He certainly gives us parameters. He certainly gives us boundaries. And he most definitely, I think of parameters and boundaries as a much better. Think of getting caught up in a bunch of rules.

And it's not bad to have spiritual experiences. He most definitely breaks through and gives us holy encounters, sweet visitations.

Jesus doesn't call us to check our brains at the door, but we can't get so caught up in our human philosophies and ideologies that we check our Jesus at the door either.

The rules of our world today, they tell us that gospel is found in things like acceptance and tolerance and affirmation of all things.

If we look at another section of the Bible, proverbs 14:12, yeah, there's a way that appears to be right. It certainly has that look to it, but in the end, it leads to death.

Friends, the gospel is found in Jesus learning more about him, following in his way, doing what he did and what he continues to do through his holy spirit, putting others before self, surrendering all that I have and all that I am to our father, that's where we find all things new. And our culture really struggles with this, right? Because in our worldly wisdom, we get really good at using this wisdom to create rules to judge others. But Jesus shows another way.

He says, hey, come lean in, get to know me. I want to show you a better way. Verses 22 and 23. These are the doctrines of men and corrupt customs that are worthless to help you spiritually. For though they may appear to possess the promise of wisdom in their submission to God through the deprivation of their physical bodies, it's actually nothing more than empty rules rooted in religious rituals.

Anyone who watched the Super bowl this last week, right? Almost anyone. Everyone. It was the largest viewership recorded in the 58 years that the Super bowl has been around. But also it was the biggest US audience for any event since the first astronauts walked in the moon in 1969.

A lot of people were watching that game. We were with some friends watching it at their house. And when we got there, they handed us these Super bowl bingo cards. And like, you check the box as you see things happen in the game. Field goals?

Check. Fumbles. Check. Overhead stadium camera angle? Check.

Taylor Swift sightings? Check. Patrick Mahomes heroics. Check. And we expected all of those things.

But at one point, there was this commercial, and we're drawn in by some engaging music, and we see images of people down on their hands and their knees, and they're in front of a person who looks very different than they do. They're probably not the most likely pairings to be sharing an intimate and a vulnerable moment.

And we look closer and we see buckets of water and we see towels.

And for people who are familiar with Bible stories, we recognized it as a footwashing, something that Jesus did.

Jesus? The night before he died, Jesus washed the feet of his friends and his enemies.

It was a totally unexpected act of service that symbolized so much more.

And this week, every form of criticism has come out against that commercial. It was offensive to church people.

It was offensive to people who despised the church. And so many people had their take on what was wrong with it. And you know what? I did, too.

Jesus, why are you washing their feet? You asked them to keep watch for 1 hour, and they fell asleep on you. They let you down. You're a leader. You're our rabbi, you're our savior, our king.

Get up off your feet. You need to act like a leader. Show a stronger image so people want to follow you. Come on, Jesus. Pull it together.

Jesus, why are you washing his feet?

It's about to get really hard. Everything's about to go down. And as soon as things get hard, that guy's gonna deny you that he even knew you three times, even.

Jesus. Don't. Don't, Jesus. No way. Not him.

That guy's been manipulating us. He's been betraying us. No, that guy is a scumbag. Get away from him. He's going to turn you over for cash.

I'm out.

But what did Jesus do, knowing all of that was to come?

He got down, right? He grabs a basin of water and a towel, and with his actions, he says, there is no measure to my love.

Jesus'washing feet totally stands against the two positions of legalism and mysticism.

See, both legalism and mysticism put us at the center. It's up to me to follow the rules, or it's about me and my spiritual experiences. Jesus puts others at the center, and he shows his love by serving them.

Was Jesus affirming Peter for denying him in his greatest moment? No.

He was loving him until the end. Was Jesus affirming Judas'acts of betrayal? No. He was throwing off the world's wisdom of putting up walls between us and our enemies, not to affirm what they do or did, but to build a bridge for them to experience God's love. And no falling short, no denying, no betraying can outrun the never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love that he has for us, for me, for you.

You know what?

We have a student in our community who's chasing hard after Jesus, and she's inviting her friends to join alongside in this sweet journey of chasing after her Jesus.

And Sunday night, she's watching the game, and one of her friends that she's inviting into that. This friend that I would classify as spiritually curious, her friend texted her during the Super bowl and said, hey, why did Jesus wash feet?

I didn't have that on my Super bowl bingo card.

But now there's a conversation happening, and this middle school girl gets to tell her friend about this Jesus who came to flip worldly wisdom on its head. And it's not about a bunch of rules being followed perfectly or having some mystical experience. It's about following the one who leads us to the places of loving our enemies.

It's about the one who wants us to experience redemption and reconciliation with himself and with each other. It's about becoming so changed by this Jesus that we're growing daily and that that growth being so evident that in our home, in our school, in our work, in our community, that they're changed, too. It's about falling in love with the one, the one who makes all things new.

So, Colossians, chapter two.

We started in it last week, and it's shown us how easy it is to get caught up in chasing a shadow and missing what's real.

When we set our sights on making Jesus the head of the body, we're able to see what he really has for us to walk in with him.

We can decipher the shadows from the reality by asking those two simple but kind of hard questions. Does this increase my affection and my connection to Jesus?

Is this distracting me and increasing my desires for the ways of this world?

We can look at Jesus and how he modeled an unexpected and surprising way of showing the measure of his love.

And we keep him at the center and do all do as he did. We get to know this Jesus more and fall more in love with the one who makes all things new. This is the way of Jesus.

What does that look like for you this week?