

The Super Bowl was just last Sunday, and my guess is a lot of Colts' fans were disappointed that Peyton's team lost.

Of course the Deck's, Jerry and Megan, were excited the Seahawks won, but we won't hold that against them!

My kids also said they were disappointed in the commercials – kind of boring they thought especially if you paid \$4 mil to buy one.

There was one commercial 4 years ago, during the 2010 game, which was a little more memorable. It was sponsored by Audi and takes a poke at the imaginary "green police" out of control.

Standing at the checkout counter of a store, the clerk tells a customer: "Okay, so it's \$37.08. Paper or plastic?"

The customer replies, "Plastic."

Into the scene walks a uniformed officer who says, "That's the magic word. Green police. You picked the wrong day to mess with the ecosystem, plastic boy." The officer then hauls the customer away with his hands in cuffs behind his back.

A green policeman then stands on the brightly lit porch of a comfortable looking suburban home. When the homeowner walks onto the porch, the officer asks, "Did you install these bulbs?" When the homeowner says yeah, he is hauled away to a waiting squad car, and a TV reporter speaks into the camera, "Tragedy strikes tonight where a man has just been arrested for possession of an incandescent light bulb."

In this ad, the problem with the green police is that they are pursuing a good thing—a healthy environment—in an extreme way. They have created rules which are legalistic and overzealous.

So it is with us if we live only by rules. If we just follow rules to the extreme, that we think will make us closer to God, and do it in a legalistic way, we won't draw nearer to God, we will be rule-followers only.

God calls to give our hearts to him, and when we do – we put God first – have a heart for Christ alone, so that we want to follow Jesus in the way we live – because it is good and pleasing to God – not because it's a bunch of rules.

Our passage today speaks to this and let's pray about it before we read.

Let's pray – God open our hearts and minds to learn more about you and to apply this Word to our lives today and this week. Amen.

SLIDE:
Colossians 2:16-23

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. 19 They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21 “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? 22 These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” STOP

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Today there is an outline that we'll be using to understand the message.

We begin with these 2 points:

SLIDE:

We can't reach God by practicing religion. Col. 2:16

We can't reach God by following rules. Col. 2:20-21

STOP

The early Jewish Christians still followed most of the strict Jewish customs and laws, like the religious festivals and keeping the Sabbath. Those were good things to keep, but Paul says to not let anyone judge you on these things. Don't let anyone say, hey, I know you helped that person change their flat tire on the Sabbath – that's against the rules. That's not what we are to be judged by, but instead by our hearts.

Ben Witherington says,

“Paul's message to the Colossians is basically stick to what you were originally taught about Jesus, and don't give in to a legalist philosophy.”

Paul says because your life is hidden with Christ,

Therefore...(2:16)

Don't let anyone judge you based on religious rules.

Don't let anyone judge you based on man-made rules.

Don't let anyone put you down by making faith a list of things you have to do or not do.

We need to:

Check out where the rules come from – are they from God or from humans?

Apparently, the Colossians were tempted to follow strict dietary laws, some of which for the Christians at Colossae sounded like:

Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!

Paul says though – in vs. 17 -
Religious rules were a shadow of things to come.

The rules are a shadow of the reality – that reality is Jesus – who we know now!

I just heard this yesterday at a seminar I attended:

Rules are about behavior modification, Jesus is about heart transformation.

We are called to follow Jesus, teach others what he taught his disciples and what he taught us. But we are to be careful about following other rules, made up by sometimes well meaning people.

Scholars think that possibly someone inside the church there was proposing the worship of angels, in vs. 18.

You might think oh we don't have to worry about that today, but we do.
People still put their focus, or worship, in the wrong places, including angels.

Joseph Loconte tells us about a popular book called, *Angels 101*:
written by metaphysician Doreen Virtue.

We are informed that, in contrast to the ideas of sin and guilt,
angels love every person unconditionally.

They help everyone who calls on them, regardless of their religious faith or lack of it.
"They look past the surface and see the godliness within all of us," she writes. "So angels aren't judgmental, and they only bring love into our lives. You're safe with the angels, and you can totally trust them."

[Doreen] Virtue lists the many ways that angels can be counted on to assist people, even in mapping out their travel plans. They will:

Help you get an extremely nice, warm, friendly, and competent customer-service representative when calling an airline to book reservations.

Help you avoid lines at check-in, and work with sweet and competent personnel

Let you sail through airport security without being searched

Protect and deliver your baggage so that your suitcases are the first ones on the luggage carousel when you're there to collect it

You might say, well we as Christians know God uses angels as his ministers and messengers but much of what this author says sounds wrong. We all know that right.

But Doreen Virtue has made appearances on CNN, Oprah, and The View, Virtue's message—clearly has a large audience. "I've discovered that the quickest and most efficient route to happiness is through connecting with the angels," she writes. "So whether you need help with your health, career, love life, family, or any other area, the angels can help you."

But Paul reminds us again, not to worship other beings or anything else than God. We are not to base our belief on human commands and teachings, vs. 22, like the worship of angels, but base our faith on Jesus – and respond - to his message of grace.

We do however need to be aware of God's teachings - But in relationship with Jesus.

So instead of follow rules, we are to follow Jesus. You might say, "Well I'm off the hook from following some very strict rules, whoo, I got that out of the way. Jesus's love just covers all the old rules. Not so fast.

Actually Jesus sets the bar higher than the Old Testament rules for his followers.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus affirms that it is a good rule to bring a gift to God at the altar, he says. Give back to God what he has first given to us.

But Jesus goes farther, "But if your brother has something against you," he says "leave your gift there and go make it right with that person first."

It's about your heart -

The relationship and your heart for Christ drives your actions.

Jesus tells the short story of the religious leader who stands and prays loudly – with pride so that others can see him. He's praying, he's following the rules, but his heart is wrong.

Jesus says there is a man with his head hung, low, saying "Forgive me Lord, I'm a sinner." Jesus says that's what he wants – this man's heart was in the right place.

As Presbyterians, we are Christians. As Christians, we follow Christ. Christ is revealed to us through the truth of God's Word, in the Bible.

So as a different kind of community of followers, we follow Jesus.

We recognize it is his grace that saves us and gives us life. And when we receive his grace in our heart, and then our actions follow our hearts.

Paul says in verse 17, even the rules of religion of the Old Testament are but a shadow of the reality. The reality we now know is a relationship, not rules, not religion, with a person Jesus. So...

SLIDE:

Have a Heart for Christ Alone

Then have your head, hands, habits follow Jesus as He leads

STOP

For me and for you, it must be a new heart, a new life with Christ which we base our lives on – and what I base my actions on.

Our response must be based on God working in us and through us with his grace – calling us to him, pursuing us.

What about our heart, head, hands, habits?

This is a way that the book “Lead Like Jesus” by Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges challenges us to live like Jesus.

We need to study him and be like him – not so much rule followers but more of a pattern of a heart led behavior.

SLIDE: (these would pop up one at a time when I say them below)

heart

head

hands

habits

STOP

HEART! – are you led by a heart for Christ alone? Do you live by the greatest command? When you think about it is a matter of the heart.

Love God with all your HEART, mind soul, strength and love your neighbor as yourself.

HEAD! – mind – we need a mind transformed the word. We need to study God’s word. We need to hear Jesus in John’s gospel when he says he came to testify to the truth, and that Jesus is the truth. Our minds need to understand the truth and grace of scripture.

HABITS!

Then our habits, our habits should follow Jesus. We should have a heart after his heart, think like him, and behave like him.

When Paul says to set our minds on things above not on earthly things, we need to think and act like Jesus. Our practices, the way we pray, the way we treat others, the way we serve, our habits follow our hearts, and our hearts are for Christ alone.

For me: I have to be careful about making my own rules.

I like my to-do lists, but I have to be careful that those are my rules to live by. Because accomplishing those doesn’t necessarily draw me to God.

I like to read, and feel a need to read and study the Bible, but I also really enjoy it. So some years I’ve set the goal of reading Bible in a year. But I have to be careful, because

accomplishing that goal can become almost an obsession or a rule. So I can miss out on having the Bible come alive to me through the Spirit and instead just checking it off my list.

Reading the Bible in a year, may or may not make me more like Christ. If I do that out of self-imposed rules as Paul says, then I may end farther away from God!

If I read the Bible in a year, and feel really good about myself, then brag about it, that can be the false humility Paul talks about it.

So if I read the Bible as I should – I need to do so with the right mindset – and the right attitude – it can be in a spiritual discipline – instead of checking it off my list, I want to read about who Jesus was, what was his character like. I want to read the great stories of the Bible which talk about God's saving of his people. I want to read about normal everyday people like me who God chose to do his work, then I know that he might choose me to do his work. That's how I want to read the Bible, not to check it off my to-do list.

So...

Instead of us reaching God through rules, God reaches down to us, and asks for a heart response.

We can't reach up to God by following a bunch of rules.

It's not about behavior modification, it's about heart transformation.

It's not about Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! It's about tastings and seeing that the Lord is good!

It's not about religion it's about a relationship

It's not about rules it's about God's grace

And God's grace is in Jesus. Let's sing about that Amazing Grace right now.

So it is God's grace that saves us – and changes our hearts to follow Jesus – let's sing of that grace now.

SING

BENEDICTION

You can have a Heart for Christ alone – because God changed your heart and made you a new person.

So live a heart led life for Christ, not a life led by a bunch of rules.

Life is more of an adventure not when we follow our own rules about what we think life should be like, but when we follow Jesus with our hearts, and our head, our hands, and our habits follow.

May the Love of God the father, mercy and grace of Jesus, courage and comfort of HS go with you now, and forevermore. Amen.

CHILDRENS' MESSAGE

What are some rules at your house?

What are some of God's rule – think 10 commandments

What did Jesus says was the greatest commandment – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Like it, Love your neighbor as yourself.

It's about your heart, give your heart to Jesus. He'll help you do the right thing, like pray, read the bible, treat people right, God will help you if yoru heart is for him.

ILLUSTRATION – MOVIES AND TV

For us, this might be how we think about the things we put in our minds, things we put in minds, like movies and TV and internet.

Movies come with ratings. For me, I rarely see an R rated movie – it's rated that way for a reason. But it's not a hard and fast rule. I would see Saving Private Ryan because I love American History and was glad that I was inspired by the sacrifice of one soldier for another in the story. Yet, I have to turn away from some of the graphic war scenes.

For other movies, we just choose not to watch them because we read the reviews and see – I don't want to put that thought idea, or picture in my mind – where my mind can save it and dwell on it. As a parent we do the same things. Just because I have two kids who are now past 13, we don't let them see all PG-13 movies, but try to look at why or why not the movie (the music, the TV show) would be ok or good to watch.

So although we are not to be obsessed with rules, it is up to us as parents to lead like Christ would lead.

"Good Morning America" interviewed former MTV video jockeys about their willingness to let their kids watch MTV:

Mark Goodman said, "My kids are not allowed to watch MTV... . Have you seen what they put on that channel?"

In a survey, parents who have concerns about how much violence their children see on television: 81%.

Percentage who set guidelines for their childrens' viewing of television: 58%

We need to look at rules not made by humans, but our heart with God.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Wacky Warning Labels™ Contest selects what it calls "the most absurd and silly warning labels attached to everyday products."

Here were the winners for the 2012 contest:

The Grand Prize Winner was for a 7-inch decorative globe with the following warning label: "These globes should not be referred for navigation."

The Second Prize Winner was for an electric razor for men with the following warning label: "Never use while sleeping."

Past winners have included the following warning labels:

"Remove child before folding"—a warning label on a baby stroller

"Does not supply oxygen"—a label on a common dust mask (2011 Contest Winner)

"Never operate your speakerphone while driving" - on a hands-free cell phone product called the "Drive 'N' Talk"! (2010 Contest Winner)

"Danger: Avoid Death"—a warning label on a small tractor

"Harmful if swallowed"—a warning on a brass fishing lure with a three-pronged hook

"This product moves when used"—a warning on a popular children's scooter

A rotary tool includes the following warning label: "This product is not intended for use as a dental drill"

"May cause drowsiness"—a warning label for Nytol One-a-Night sleeping aids

Green police

TEENS AND RULES

The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse has released an extensive study on teens and substance abuse. Their main finding was that "teens whose parents have established rules in the house have better relationships with their parents and a substantially lower risk of smoking, drinking, and using illegal drugs than the typical teen."

Out of the 526 girls and 474 boys between ages 12 and 17 evaluated, the study found that only 25 percent live with parents who establish and enforce rules in the home. These 25 percent are at less risk for drug abuse than teens whose parents impose few or no rules.

The study discovered that the successful parents habitually did at least 10 of the following 12 actions:

Monitor what their teens watch on TV.

Monitor what their teens do on the Internet.

Put restrictions on the CDs they buy.

Know where their teens are after school and on weekends.

Are told the truth by their teens about where they really are going.

Are "very aware" of their teens academic performance.

Impose a curfew.

Make clear they would be "extremely upset" if their teen used pot.

Eat dinner with their teens six or seven nights a week.

Turn off the TV during dinner.

Assign their teen regular chores.

Have an adult present when the teens return home from school.

Of the teens living in lax homes, only 24 percent had an exceptionally good relationship with their mothers and 13 percent with their fathers. Of the teens living in relatively strict homes, 57 percent had an exceptionally good relationship with their mothers and 47 percent with their fathers.

The Center's president Joseph A. Califano Jr., former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, comments: "Mothers and fathers who are parents rather than pals can greatly reduce the risk of their children smoking, drinking and using drugs."

Jesus flavored Jesus fillednnn100 percent juice, all natural."

[There was also a picture of] a ripe pomegranate [spilling] its exotic, glistening seeds onto mounds of fat, perfect blueberries. ...

And then I read the ingredients list: "Filtered water, pear juice concentrate, apple juice concentrate, grape juice concentrate." Where was the blueberry? Where was the pomegranate? Finally I found them, fifth and seventh on a list of nine ingredients, after mysteriously unspecified "natural flavors."

By law, food ingredients are listed in descending order of weight. That means a product contains the greatest proportion of the first ingredient on the list and successively less of those farther down. So according to this list, the jug in my hand held mostly water and other juices, with just enough blueberry and pomegranate for flavor and color.

In the bottom corner of the front label, in small, easy-to-miss type, were the tell-tale words: "Flavored juice blend with other natural ingredients." The enticing pictures and clever labeling were decoys to sell a diluted, blueberry-pomegranate flavored product, convincingly disguised to look like something it wasn't. I put the juice back on the shelf.

I left the store empty-handed and wondering, What if I had an ingredients list printed on me? Would Jesus be the main ingredient? If not, how far down the list would he be? Would my "label" accurately represent my contents? Or would I falsely project a misleading outward appearance that cleverly masked diluted ingredients? My packaging may be convincing. I may look and sound like the real thing. But what if someone came to me looking for Jesus beneath my "Christian" label and found something else? Something Jesus-flavored, but not Jesus-filled? ...