

“I’m a Rule Keeper”

Galatians 3:23-29

June 24, 2007, 8:56 and 11 am

- I. Concert with Amy and friends
 - a. Sneaking upstairs to the “cheap seats”
 - b. Bossy usher
 - c. Scared all night that we would get into trouble
- II. Legalism versus faith
 - a. Now, I’m a Christian – I just say that in case there was any question. But what I mean is, under Christ, I am supposed to be free from the bondage of the Law. I should be foot-loose and fancy-free. But that isn’t exactly how I feel most of the time.
 - b. Most of the time, I am very focused on the rules. Many of the rules are written in the Bible, but a vast majority of the things I worry about aren’t in any book. I don’t say this as a pastor – I say this as a Christian.
 - i. I worry about how I look. I worry about what I say – especially if I say something that I think is funny but no one laughs. I worry about my sinfulness, and I worry about why I’m not without sin.
 - ii. I could give you a moment in my life and what it is like but, for some of you, you know exactly how I feel. Your mind is constantly evaluating and analyzing how well you are following the cultural norms, the Christian values, and even how we act at Church.
 - c. Now, I don’t just do that for myself. To a lesser degree, I hold others up to my standards as well. I used to do it to a much larger degree, but I grew up and realized what might be true for me as a “rule” didn’t really mean that everyone else should be following those same things.
 - d. I am very quick to admit that to some degree that I am a legalist. I study the rules of our faith and worry when I discover that I have done something against the Methodist doctrine or when I hear someone reveal a sin that I had never considered.
 - e. That is what rule keepers do: we worry about breaking the rules. We are the folks who don’t let the gas tank get below a quarter of a tank just to make sure we are not going to cross the line and the Empty light comes on.
- III. Religion versus faith
 - a. I know I sound neurotic but I think we all get a little obsessive about the rules of our faith. The irony is that phrase “rules of faith” is an oxymoron. That is what Paul is explaining here in Galatians. It is even ironic that Paul is the one who wrote these words because Paul is blamed for creating most of these rules as he set out answering questions from the many churches of Asia minor and Europe.
 - b. But when you start getting into the rules you start creating something very dangerous: religion.
 - c. Religion is what Jesus came to destroy. When you hear Jesus talking to the Pharisees and Sadducees and the keepers of the Law and He seems to be getting a little tweaked, it is because He is confronting religion. Religion is the most

dangerous thing a Christian can get involved with. Religion is the opposite of faith.

- d. There is an old saying that the greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he doesn't exist. Sounds nice, but author Donald Miller has made a far better statement: "I believe that the greatest trick of the devil is not to get us into some kind of evil but rather have us wasting time. That is why the devil tries so hard to get Christians to be religious. If he can sink a man's mind into a habit, he will prevent his heart from engaging God."
- e. He goes on to say, "I could walk around inside religion and never, on any sort of emotional level, understand that God was a person, an actual Being with thoughts and feelings and that sort of thing. To me, God was more of an idea. It was like a slot machine, a set of spinning images that dolled out rewards based on behavior and perhaps, chance.... What I was doing was more in line with superstition than spirituality. But it worked. If something nice happened to me, it was God, and if something nice didn't, I went back to the slot machine, knelt down in prayer, and pulled the lever a few more times. I liked this God very much because you hardly had to talk to it and it never talked back."¹
- f. That is religion. It is not about God but about our ideas about God. It is about what God wants us to do, but rarely about why we should do it. It is about food laws, not the reasons why God loved His people enough to spare them the problems of salmonella. Religion is all the things you do to come to church, not about the act of worship itself. Religion is the rules. Religion has very little to do with God Himself.

IV. Video

V. Freedom through faith

- a. But there is hope. It is called faith.
- b. Faith is not about rules at all. Faith is about relationship.
- c. To put this in perspective, I have been married to my wife for a little over a year. We joke about the fact that we rules, but we really don't. What we do have is love for one another. There are things that I don't do – or try not to do – because I love her. There are things she doesn't do – or tries not to do – because she loves me. And I want to know what those things are because a) it kind of hurts both of our feelings when we overstep our bounds and b) because it is exciting that I have learned something new about my wife.
- d. I think the same thing is true for our faith as well. We act not because of fear of the rules or the law but because we love God. And as you read the Bible, you will quickly discover that 50% of those things that concern us aren't in the Bible. So, how do we know how to honor God with our lives? We pray. We grow in our relationship with Him. And we make mistakes. And the Spirit reveals those mistakes to us, and then we try not to do them again.
- e. Faith, though, is not about the mistakes. It is not about the rules. It is always about the relationship. When we are focusing way too much about how we are to live out being a Christian, we are moving very quickly into religion. The "how" is far less important as the "why". And the "why" should always be our love for Jesus Christ.

¹ D. Miller, Blue Like Jazz, pg. 8-9 and 13.

- VI. This is the challenge of being a rule-keeper in a faith driven world.
- a. I struggle with this so often. Religion is nice and safe – but it isn't about God. It is about "how" and "what". Those kinds of things are fine, but only in the context of the "why". Is it ok to have a drink at a bar is a good question, but your response to it, if not couched in love, is missing the relationship. So many of our hardest questions need to come out of seeking a deeper relationship with our Lord rather than getting an answer.
 - b. Jesus once said that He didn't come to abolish the Law but to fulfill the Law.² What he meant was that He came to show us a new way of living the Law. Not as legalism or blindly, but out of devotion not the Law as a god, but devotion to the God that created the Law.
 - c. Paul, later in Galatians, uses the phrase "the law of Christ." What he means here is the law of love. When we are obedient to this law, one we can only know in fullness when we are in relationship with Jesus Christ – the author of love, then everything else falls into place.
- VII. I'm a rule-keeper, but my faith is in Jesus Christ. He is my hope and my salvation. In Him I have found my "why". It is in Him that I have found my one rule – to love and honor Him.
- a. This isn't always easy. No relationship is ever easy, though. May we understand as we leave here today that we aren't going forth to share our religion, but to share our relationship. And in knowing this, may we all discover the freedom that comes in knowing Jesus Christ.

² Matthew 5:17.