

### **Colossians 2:13-17**

**Even when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ by forgiving us all our trespasses. <sup>14</sup> God erased the record of our debt brought against us by his legal demands. This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> After disarming the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them by triumphing over them in Christ.**

**<sup>16</sup> Therefore, do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in regard to a festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath day. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things that were coming, but the body belongs to Christ.**

Dear children of God by grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus,

Do you like rules? Some people seem to like things laid out for them in black and white and lots of rules seem to help these types of people to see things in black and white or right and wrong more clearly. Others seem to see things in different shades of gray. Their version of right and wrong seems a little fuzzy at times. They seem to be riding the fence of what is right and what is wrong.

Let me ask you a question. Do you think that it would have been easier to be a child of God in the Old Testament than in the New Testament times that we now live? By that I mean, do you think it would have been easier or harder to live under the many different specific rules that God had laid out for the Old Testament people of God. They were told in very black and white terms when to worship and how to worship. They were told exactly what food to eat and what food not to eat. They were told what kind of sacrifices needed to be done and on what special days for what specific purpose.

On the other hand, we as New Testament Christians don't live on under these Old Testament special rules anymore that God had set up for those Old Testament people. We aren't told how to worship and on what days to worship. We aren't told what to eat and what specific days are to be celebrated as special days. Does that make it easier or more difficult to be one of God's children?

I'm not sure I have an answer to that question, but it does get us thinking. Why don't we follow the rules that the Old Testament Christians did and why aren't we obligated to celebrate the Passover and Day of Atonement? Are we saved in a different way than they were in the Old Testament? All of these things will be talked about today as the Apostle Paul was reminding the New Testament Christians in the city of Colosse about rules and what part they play in their spiritual lives. So today let's seek to grow together in our faith as we look for an answer to the question:

### **Sermon Theme: Is God A God of Rules?**

- 1. Keeping God's Rules Can't Save Us**
- 2. Christians Will Eagerly Follow God's Rules**

The first part of this answer is very easy. Yes, God is a certainly a God of rules. God from the very beginning of time demanded that all people should be holy and perfect like him. That is the standard that God has set and that rule and demand will always be black and white and there is no shade of gray. If we could remain perfect in all that we say and do, then we would be in heaven, The problem is that from the fall into sin at the time of Adam and Eve, sin and death entered the world and perfection was lost. All people are

now born dead in sin as Paul writes, “**when you were dead in your trespasses.**” That is a fact, “**The wages of sin is death.**” (Rom 6:23) So as Paul writes to us, he is also writing to all people whether we lived in the Old or New Testament time period. There is no one who can save themselves by keeping all of God’s rules. “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” (Romans 3:23) That isn’t too difficult to understand. God is a God of rules and he expects all of his children to follow all of his commands.

So why does God give us all these rules to follow, if he knew we could never keep them? Why did he give the Old Testament people of Israel so many rules and commands and a very special way to worship? Were these rules helping them to earn their way to heaven? The answer is emphatically, No! Not one sin was paid for and not one person was saved by the keeping of any or all of the rules God set up.

So we might ask why did God give them all these rules in the first place if they didn’t saved anyone? That is a very good question. Paul describes these Old Testament rules as “**a shadow of the things that are coming, but the body belongs to Christ.**” Does that make any sense? All of those Old Testament rules and regulations were a shadow to help them to be ready for Jesus who would be the real thing. The sacrifices and special worship life were to show them their sin and that Jesus would one day come to be the ultimate sacrifice that would pay for all those sins.

Maybe we can understand this picture better, if we think of what a shadow is. The shadow comes only if there is also a real object coming. When I ride my bike, I many times will know someone is going to soon pass me by seeing their shadow coming and I know that soon after there will be a bike rider which is the real thing. In the same way the Old Testament rules showed the people that something real was coming and that was Jesus. They had to wait patiently for the real thing to come and it did in the form of Jesus.

And what did Jesus do that we couldn’t do? Paul writes, “**God made you alive with Christ by forgiving us all our trespasses.** <sup>14</sup> **God erased the record of our debt brought against us by his legal demands. This record stood against us, but he took it away by nailing it to the cross.** <sup>15</sup> **After disarming the rulers and authorities, he made a public display of them by triumphing over them in Christ.**” Those are powerful words. That is exactly what are sinful hearts and lives needed. We needed a perfect sacrifice that would pay for all the rules of God that we have broken. We needed a Savior who could cancel our debt of sin and rid us of all our wrongs and sins. He did this by allowing himself to be nailed to the cross and by doing this showed that he defeated sin and death and the power of the devil. This is the only way to heaven. We can’t get to heaven by holding on to the shadow of Old Testament laws and rules. We only get to heaven by the grace and mercy of God found in the perfect life and death of God’s perfect Son, Jesus.

## 2. Christians will Eagerly Follow God’s Rules

That all seems very obvious, but does that mean that we don’t need rules anymore? Yes and no. Yes, we don’t need to follow the rules to get to heaven, but God has given us his rules and commands out of love for us. His rules, which are summed very well in the 10 commandments, are given to us by our good and gracious God in heaven because he loves us. By keeping God’s laws we are showing our thanks and love to God for all that he has done for us and we are showing our love for others as we treat them with love and respect. By the way we live and act, we are showing that our faith is alive and well.

Here comes the problem! The devil has taken our acts of love which we do as we keep his commands and rules and has twisted them in so many ways. He twisted the hearts and minds of the Christians in the city of Colosse to the point that they were being taught by false teachers that you needed to both trust in Jesus and you also needed to follow the Old Testament rules and regulations. If you did both, you would be saved. Do you remember what Paul wrote about this? “**Therefore, do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or**

**drink, or in regard to a festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath day.** <sup>17</sup> **These are a shadow of the things that were coming, but the body belongs to Christ.**” If you are keeping the 10 Commandments or any of the rules that God has given because you think by doing them you can find favor with God or you think you are appeasing God, then you are doing them for the wrong reason. Paul was telling Christians of all times, that God’s grace and mercy don’t need our help and we can’t in any way be saved by our good works.

I’m guessing that there are not many people listening to today’s sermon who would disagree with this, and most would say that they are firmly rooted on the fact that they are saved by grace without their works, but the devil and sin are always looking to wreck this beautiful truth. There are so many subtle twists and turns that the devil can and does use that we many times begin to look at things in the wrong way and are confusing God’s Law and Gospel. There are the two extremes which are both harmful: On the one side we are too hard on our ourselves when we have thoughts like this, *“I always have this nagging guilt that comes from feeling like I’ve not doing enough for God. I am not praying enough or reading my Bible enough. I feel that God is always unhappy with me. I know that technically, God has forgiven me because of Jesus’ death for me, but I just don’t feel that I have been good enough to be forgiven.”*

The other side is that we are too hard on others, when we have these type of thoughts, *“I’m so hard on others, and I am overly critical of others because of their seemingly lack of Christian living. When I see someone struggling with sin or not adhering to God’s standards or holding them as high as I hold them, I tend to forget the plank in my own eye and jump to point out those who don’t seem to live like I am living.”*

Or it might even be a little more subtle. We get caught up in things that God doesn’t command or forbid which we call adiaphora. The problem is that we many times like to take things that God has never commanded or forbidden and turned them into laws that can’t be broken. *“We can’t use the new Lord’s Prayer, because that would be wrong. We must use the KJV translation or TLH Hymnal or using contemporary music must be wrong. We need to have a traditional worship service with the Pastor wearing a certain color robe and preaching from the pulpit with organ accompaniment. Anyone who does it different is wrong.”* While none of these things are necessarily wrong and many of them are time tested and beneficial, do you get the point? None of these are rules or traditions that really matter. What matters is to have God’s Word taught in its truth and purity and that we gather around his Word and Sacraments to feed our faith and hear the message of God’s Law and Gospel for the forgiveness of our sins. Yes, we need rules and doing things in an orderly way is God-pleasing and has worked well for a long time, but we can’t make rules where God hasn’t made rules. Then we are going further than God has intended.

Like in our Gospel Lesson for today, we saw the Pharisees making rules where God never intended rules as far as working or eating on the Sabbath. They went too far. And as Paul correctly points out in our text, keeping the rules isn’t what gets us saved and into heaven. It isn’t grace + works. It is only grace. So why do we do good works? We do them to thank and praise our good and gracious God who has cancelled our debt of sin by the blood of Jesus. Good works are not necessary for our salvation, but they are necessary to show that our faith is alive and well and that our faith is firmly connected to Jesus, the vine, and our faith is bearing much fruit by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So back to our question, Is God a God of Rules? I pray that we can answer that boldly and correctly. Yes, he is a God of rules and because we broke his rules he showed his undeserved love for us as he sent his one and only Son to pay the full debt of our sin on the cross of Calvary. God gave us the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit, which means that we are God’s new creations which seek to serve and praise God as we keep his commands and serve others and repent when we fail and trust in God’s forgiving love for salvation. We are not saved by keeping any rules. We are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen