



## Sermon Five: More than Rules

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I am sure each one of us has heard of or can remember a girl in high school who did matric maybe a year or two ahead of us.

She got pregnant when she was sixteen or seventeen years old. And the news of the pregnancy spread very quickly.

And the sad fact is that she may be going to church even though she was showing, and what would be the response of this?

Members of the church (FANS) would have a problem with this because they didn't want their kids to see this teenager who was pregnant.

Have you heard this before?

There are two moms sitting in the seats just near you, and this girl, quite pregnant walks into the building, and one mom says to the other mom,

***"I can't believe she'd come here in a condition like that."***

The sad fact is the gossip starts their and ends up with the girl never coming back to the church.

This is one of the reasons Gandhi said of Christians!

***"I like your Christ. I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."***

And this reminds me of John Chapter 8.

### **READ John 8:1-11**

- We read about Jesus teaching in the courtyard one morning.
- His teaching is interrupted by an angry mob that bursts onto the scene.
- The mob is made up of the religious leaders of His day.
- Being pushed along on the crest of the mob is this woman, and perhaps she is dressed in nothing but a bed sheet as she is shoved to the dirt on the ground in front of Jesus.
- One of the religious leaders gives the accusation to Jesus and says,

***"We found this woman in bed with a man that was not her husband. The Law says we stone***

***her. What do you say?"***

This was a pushy move by these religious leaders.

**They tried to use the rules trap Jesus.**

**Rules can do that to us; turn us into an angry mob of sorts.**

We might not form together and parade a sinner around town, although some churches would stoop to this level, **but we'll huddle in whispering circles and drop someone's name to everyone we talk to.**

Please understand:

**God's Word provides both guidance and commandments.**

**And those are here to protect us.**

**And, if we're honest, none of us can follow those laws perfectly.**

Every one of us has fallen short, some of us in more public settings, and others in more private ones.

**But when we overemphasize following the rules**, we can get people thinking we've got it all figured out.

**We can get people thinking they shouldn't share their struggles with us, because we're perfect.**

**And that's what I want to address this morning.**

Sometimes, certain Christians (FANS) can be a lot more like the Pharisees and religious leaders than our Messiah, and they end up using the rules to rationalize how they treat others in the church.

Especially newcomers or those whose sins are more difficult to hide.

Now I think this happens oftentimes unintentionally.

Christians like these mean well.

They'll say;

***"Well, we're keeping the standard high.***

*"We want to make sure we maintain a certain level of excellence."*

**And so they make it hard for people to come to God.**

*"If you want to come to God then you've got to follow all these rules that we've established just to make sure that only the people who are really serious get in."*

But in the end, these well-meaning believers end up creating a list of rules that wear out and frustrate new believers.

### **1) Rules Can Be Cumbersome**

For example, you might have grown up going to a school that had a lot of rules.

- They had every right to have these rules.
- It's great for schools or for homes and families to have some rules.
- I don't have a problem with them.

But there are sometimes just too many rules.

- Like, you couldn't have your hair below your collar if you were a boy.
- Girls' skirts couldn't be more than a couple of inches above their knee, and they would have a ruler where this would be measured.
- You had to be clean-shaven at school, and when some boys at age thirteen get sent home from school because they hadn't shaved.
- Boys had to wear the collared shirts and girls had certain rules about makeup and jewelry.

There were and are still all kinds of rules and they are closely monitored and followed.

Again, it's fine for schools, families to have those rules, but here is what happens for a lot of kids.

They associate these rules **not** with going to school **but** with being a Christian.

**Somehow many of them got the message that these are rules you've got to follow if you're really a Christian.**

And when they finished high school many of them just walk away exhausted.

- Exhausted from trying to keep all the rules at school & at home.

And again those rules are fine.

The problem is that they somehow got the idea that following rules made them a Christian.

This woman in John 8,

- She is looking down—humiliated, guilty, ashamed.
- She's been caught breaking the rules, and this may be the day that breaking a rule costs her everything.

Jesus kneels down and He begins to write something in the dirt.

We don't know what He was writing.

Some commentators speculate that perhaps He was writing the sins of the accusers in the dirt.

Meanwhile, the religious leaders wait for an answer.

They know they've caught Jesus by surprise, & they're ready to hear Him submit to the letter of the law.

They're waiting for him to shrug his shoulders and say, **"Well, those are the rules."**

Finally, Jesus looks up at these spiritual leaders & He says,

***"If any one of you is without sin, he can cast the first stone."***

And one by one these bullies drop their stones (I think they know that Jesus knows.) and they walk away and Jesus is left alone with this woman.

And perhaps with a little bit of a smile, He looks up at the woman and He says,

***"Is there anyone left to condemn you?"***

Maybe she thought,  
“There is still one. There is still one who could condemn me.”  
And then Jesus says with tenderness,

***“Neither do I condemn you. You go now & leave your life of sin.”***

## **2) The Rules Don’t Inspire Grace**

A teacher at a high school did something a little unusual  
– He wanted to teach a lesson about God’s grace.  
He handed out a test all that knew would be difficult.  
The students had been preparing for this test for several months.  
When he handed out the test, he told them,  
I want you to read through the entire test before you begin to take it. As they read through the test – most of them realized they were in trouble  
– I should have studied more  
But when got to the end of the multiple page test & read these words at the bottom, it said,

***“You can try and get an “A” by taking this test or you can just put your name on it and automatically receive an “A.”***

Many signed their names, walked up to the desk & walked out.

Later students found out that one of the boys in the class didn’t read through the test – he just started taking the test – though most of the class turned their test in after a few seconds & – Patrick never caught on.  
It’s too bad too – because I’m sure it would have been the only “A” Patrick would have received.

And then there was Mary – and apparently she got quite upset because she had spent so much time studying – and what kind of teacher gives an “A” for nothing –  
She stayed and took the test on principle. If she was going to get an “A” she was going to earn it.

And a FAN says – I’m not taking any handouts – I can do this on my own.

So FANS spend their lives carrying around the burden of religion.

And the grace of Jesus, that same grace that saved a woman from being stoned, calls to those who have been hauling around a long list of rules and rituals and obligations,

Jesus calls to those who tired of pretending to be more than they are. He calls to those who have had the guilt and fear of religions wear them down and he says

***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”***

Maybe you grew up in a home where you were taught all about Jesus. You went to church on the weekend and church camp in the summer.

And you learned to fear Jesus...so you kept as many rules as you could hoping you wouldn't go to hell.

And when you would sin you would feel guilt wondering if you would be good enough.

And you were taught to observe different religious traditions and rule keeping.

But someone how you never really fell in love with Jesus.

You became a FAN.

Because when you come into a situation in which rules take precedence over love and grace, it's hard to fall in love.

Think about it this way: when I got married to my wife there were some rules that I said I would live by – some of them are written, some unwritten.

But I understood when I said “I DO” that I would:

1. Be faithful to her. As long as we both live I am going to be hers alone.
2. To provide for her. I'm going to meet her needs.
3. To be committed to her. For better or for worse.

There are other rules I didn't know about that have since been established...

1. I am to keep my cupboard clean.
2. I am not to make fun of her before 10 a.m.

3. I am to say out loud what I am thinking.

If I saw our relationship as a bunch of rules I had to keep, I wouldn't be very happy.

But because I love my wife I find joy in being a good husband.

I would do anything for her, and so doing the dishes, or putting the lid down on the toilet, or other extravagant acts of sacrifice are a joy for me—most of the time.

In the end, the grace and the love of God frees us and inspires us to live for him.

Augustine said,

***“Who can be good, if not made so by loving? . . . Love God and do as you please.”***

He could say that because he knew that when you love God, you will want to please God. But your priority, your emphasis, your focus has to be on loving God. It has to be about a relationship with Jesus, otherwise it won't work.

### **3) The Rules Don't Keep Us Around**

I want to say this very carefully and clearly.

***When our kids grow up and they define Christianity as keeping a moral code instead of defining Christianity as being a follower of Jesus Christ, then they will walk away from both.***

We think,

***“Well, I've got to make sure that they understand these rules and these moral obligations of being a Christian.”***

And while that's true, I'm telling you, if they define Christianity that way instead of defining Christianity as **FOLLOWING** Jesus, they will walk away from both.

They will walk away from Jesus and the moral code.

We must define Christianity, first and foremost, as the **FOLLOWING** of Jesus Christ.

We cannot expect to recruit the world to a set of standards that we would never live by or follow if it wasn't for a love relationship with Jesus Christ.

They're not going to get on board with that—unless it's because they know Jesus.

**So it must, first and foremost, be about following Christ.**

This is a note from a volunteer. She volunteers in the Welcome Center of a church and she wrote this note to the pastor

*It was about five minutes until the service started and a young woman, probably in her late twenties/early thirties, walked in with her fifth grade son and approached me with kind of a “deer in the headlights” look.*

*She had never been here and was nervous. I took her to the check-in counter for her son’s class and on the way there she told me that she had gotten divorced six years ago and after that she was no longer welcome at the church that she had gone to. She hadn’t been to church since then and you could just hear the guilt in her voice and she was terribly nervous. I shared with her that I had been divorced and a single mom and I knew how tough that was. Once her son was in class I asked her if she wanted to sit with me in the worship service. Upon hearing my invitation she asked, “Am I allowed to go in the sanctuary since I’m not a member?” I told her she was. When we got to our seats the service had already started and everyone was standing and singing, and after the song the young man leading worship prayed and the first words out of his mouth were, “God, thank you that no matter where our path has taken us in life you can redeem us and forgive us.” With that her tears started to flow and really didn’t stop throughout the entire service. I could just see the fear and the guilt melt away. Her body language went from tense and frightened to calm but excited. As we were standing for a few worship songs at the end of the service she appeared a bit antsy. I assumed that she was probably ready to leave and go pick up her son, so I turned to ask her if she was ready to leave. But before I had a chance she opened her mouth and she said, “Do I need to walk down there and talk to him if I want to join your church?” I said, “Yes, you do.” She said, “I want to do that.” I asked her if she wanted me to walk with her and she said, “Yes,” so we walked down front.*

The pastor tells the rest of the story



I greeted her at the front. She leaned forward and she whispered in my ear,  
“I went through a divorce a few years ago and my other church wouldn’t have me.”  
It was really more of a question than a statement.  
And I said,  
“I am...I am sorry. We would love to have you.”

And we would. We would love to have you.

- I don’t know what your story is.
- I don’t know if there is a Christian who bullied you, misrepresented Jesus Christ, who wasn’t at all like Christ.
- I don’t know if it was a church that taught you a lot of traditions and rules and regulations, but you never really got around to studying the Gospel of Jesus or the Scripture.
- I don’t know if maybe you grew up in some kind of religious affiliation where nobody seemed to make that big a deal out of grace but sure made you feel really guilty every weekend.

**We would love to have you come and experience the freedom that is found in knowing and following Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.**

When we started this series, we talked about a scene in John chapter 6.

- Great crowds were traveling with Jesus.
- By now, He was at the height of His popularity.
- Word had spread about miraculous healings and inspirational teaching.
- So huge crowds had gathered to cheer Him on.
- We’re told that there were about 5,000 men.
- But that was just the men.
- Likely the crowd was in excess of 15,000.
- After a full day, Jesus knows the people are getting hungry, and so He turns to his disciples and asks what all these people will do for food. 15,000 is a lot of mouths to feed.

One of the disciples, Philip, tells Jesus that even if they had eight months wages it wouldn’t be enough money to buy bread for everyone to have a bite.

**RULES - From Philip’s perspective, this isn’t their problem and even if it was, there really isn’t**

**anything they can do.**

But another disciple, Andrew, has been scanning the crowd and he tells Jesus of a boy in the crowd that has five loaves of bread and two small fish.

**I can picture Andrew making this announcement with a smile and a sense of expectation of what Jesus might do next.**

And Jesus doesn't disappoint.

He takes the boy's sack lunch and he feeds the entire crowd.

The Bible tells us that even after everyone had their fill there was still plenty of food left over.

AMEN



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