

The Trouble With Christianity

Rules

April 17/18, 2010

Good morning everyone.

As Kitti said, we're in the second week of our series *The Trouble With Christianity*; taking a look at some of the reasons why people who aren't Christians *aren't Christians*. Last week we talked about hypocrisy – which is the number one reason why most people who stay away from church and Christianity stay away.

This week, as you might have guessed from the skit, we're going to talk about “rules” because a lot of people who aren't followers of Jesus consider “the rules” to be another barrier. Who wants to sign up for the kind of life where you always have to check some kind of little book or big book before you think, say or do anything? More importantly, who wants to be part of a group that's known more for what it's against than what it's for?

And that *is* the perception, by the way, of Christians – especially evangelical Christians (which would describe our church in case you are wondering). Christians are perceived as being more “against” than “for.”

Last week, I mentioned two books that I am using as resources in this series: *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller and *Un-Christian* by David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons. Kinnaman and Lyons wrote their book because they were shocked and dismayed to discover what people really think of us.

“It would be hard to overestimate,” writes Kinnaman, “how firmly people reject – and feel rejected by – Christians.”¹

According to their research ...

91% of non-church people think Christians are anti-homosexual

87% think we're judgmental

85% say we're hypocritical

78% old-fashioned

75% too political

70% insensitive to others

And 68% say we're the last people they'd call for dinner because we're too boring

Lyons writes, “I'll never forget sitting in Starbucks poring through the research results on my laptop. As I soaked it in, I glanced at the people around me and was overwhelmed with the thought that this is what *they* think of *me*. It was a sobering thought to know that if I had stood up and announced myself as a 'Christian' to the customers assembled in Starbucks that day, they would have associated me with every one of the negative perceptions described in this book.”²

That's pretty strong isn't it? So, is it true? Are those perceptions about Christians accurate?

There's a case to be made that a lot of what people think about Christians and Christianity has been heavily influenced by entertainment and news media. There's no doubt that the fundamental claim of Christianity – that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, crucified, risen and coming again – is diametrically opposed to the prevailing philosophy of this world that says “we don't believe that and we don't need that. We don't need a God. We don't need *your* God.”

For that reason alone, you would expect there to be a lot of negative stereotyping of Christians. After all, it's been that way from the very beginning of Christianity, way back when the Roman Emperor Nero needed a scapegoat for the fire that destroyed much of Rome. Christians were easy targets because they were different.

However ... there's a lot of truth in the perceptions because many Christians *do* focus more on what they're against rather than what they're for. And that creates a perception. And, as they say, "perception is reality." True or not, what people think of you is what you have to deal with. You cannot live for very long in the world of "what people *ought* to think of me, or us."

So, how can we deal with this perception and this reality? I think it comes back to "the rules," specifically, a misunderstanding of the purpose of "the rules." And I think the misunderstanding cuts both ways. I think there are some things that those who are *not* followers of Christ misunderstand about the rules, and there are some things that those who *are* followers of Christ misunderstand ... and that's what I want to try and clear up in this message.

In fact, let me just tell you what I'm going to tell you in this message. Let me just get right to the bottom line at the very beginning and then I'll take the rest of the message to explain what I mean. Here's the bottom line, what those who are not Christians need to understand and what those who are Christians need to understand.

God's rules for living can be a blessing or a curse. It all depends on how you look at them.

Now, just to be clear, when I say "God's rules for living" I'm talking about things like the Ten Commandments, but not just the Ten Commandments. I'm also talking about matters of conscience; those standards we each have to develop to address the grey areas that are not covered by the Big Ten. And I'm also talking about the values, behaviors and practices to which we commit whenever we join a group of any kind, not just Christianity.

For example, let me give you a picture of this. When I was in high school, not long after I had accepted Christ, I was trying to explain to my algebra teacher, Mr. Watkins, what had happened to me and what it meant to be a Christian. I had a pretty good hunch that he probably wasn't a believer and so I was "witnessing" to him (and, honestly, not so much because I *cared about him as a person*, as much as it was "just the right thing to do as a Christian" – and witnessing was one of those "right things." It was part of "the rules").

Anyway, Mr. Watkins – who was probably not more than 10 years older than me, in his mid-20s – listened to what I had to say and then he said, "So, if I accept Jesus like you did, am I going to have to quit smoking and drinking? Am I going to have to stop going out dancing on the weekends? Do I have to start getting up on Sunday mornings to go church – which will be a problem because I'm usually out late on Saturday night – and am I going to have to start putting money in the offering plate?"

And I can just remember being stopped in my tracks. "Ummm ... I don't know. I think eventually you might."

Then he said, "Well, if that's how it works, I'm not interested."

And after that he started calling me "the Jesus freak." I was stereotyped. Of course, it didn't help matters that I was a poor and disruptive student and he had to kick me out of his class eventually.

Rules as Blessing

Be that as it may, Mr. Watkins' question represented a line of thinking that a lot of non-Christians have when it comes to Christianity, which is that "Christianity is just a moral straitjacket imposed by a legalistic God and legalistic Christians, who just want everyone in the whole world to march together in lockstep. How can something that limits human freedom so much be true

in the first place and then be worth embracing in the second place?”

From this perspective, “the rules” – the moral authority of the scripture and even God Himself – are viewed as a curse.

“Freedom to determine our own moral standards,” writes Keller, “is considered a *necessity* for being fully human,” so any constraint or confinement is, by this definition, immoral itself.³ Evil. A curse.

Of course, a little bit of logic reveals that it’s not that simple. In many cases, confinement and restraint is actually a means to liberation⁴ and what we consider to be total freedom is actually the road to bondage.

For example, if I decide that I’m going to forget about my diet and eat whatever I want, when I want, and as much as I want ... it *feels* like freedom at first. But eventually, what I begin to experience is not freedom. What I experience is bondage. And my enslavement then is revealed not only in the fact that I can’t control what I put in my mouth anymore, but also in the fact that my “freedom” is slowly but surely destroying my health. From that point of view, the constraint of the diet was actually a means to freedom. It was actually a blessing, not a curse.

I think it might be helpful for those who are not Christians to think about God’s rules in a similar manner.

1. Specifically, God’s rules are a blessing because they are the right rules for the right reason.

In other words, God’s moral authority isn’t capricious or arbitrary. In the Ten Commandments, for example, God isn’t saying “jump” because He wants to see how high we will. God gives instruction for life because it is what protects us and gives us freedom.

And we see this intention in God from the very first pages of the Bible. Genesis Chapter Three tells us that that after God created the first man, he gave him a rule.

The Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." Genesis 2:15-17
(NIV)

God’s rule was intended to show Adam the way to preserve and protect and enjoy his life.

Unfortunately, Adam, along with the rest of us who have had to suffer under the curse of sin that followed, discovered the hard way that it was the right rule for the right reason.

Of course, a lot of people *will agree* that freedom isn’t merely the lack of restraint. Where we’ll *disagree* is with the idea that some external entity – whether God, the Bible, Christianity, etc. – some external entity should be able to define the rules *for us personally*. There ought to be rules, but part of what it means to be free, we believe, is in being able to determine what’s right and wrong *for ourselves*.

On the surface of it, that *seems* to make sense. It certainly is a popular view.

But let me ask you a question. Actually, it’s a question Keller raises in his book...

And we’ll put it on the board so you can see it and think about it.

Do you think there is anyone in the world right this minute doing something they should stop doing no matter what they believe personally about the correctness of their behavior?

Let me say that again. Do you think there is anyone in the world right this minute doing something they should stop doing no matter what they personally think about it, whether it's right or wrong?

I do. I think murderers should stop murdering right now; I think thieves should stop stealing; liars should stop lying; child abusers should stop abusing; corrupt government officials should stop doing whatever is corrupt.

Don't you? I'm sure you do.

And since you do, doesn't that mean that you also believe there is some moral authority that is *not* defined by each individual; that must be obeyed regardless of what a person feels or thinks?⁵

Of course you do. And since you do, you're not as far from Christianity as you might think. The only difference – if there is a difference – is that Christians say that the authority is, ultimately, God.

There are other reasons why God's rules are a blessing and not a curse, but only one more that I have time to talk about today. And I want to mention this because the Bible makes such a big deal out of it that I would be remiss *not* to mention it.

2. The Bible tells us that God's rules are a blessing because they reveal our fallenness.

By that I mean that they reveal to us where we fall short of God's design for our lives. They show the gap between what we are and what God intended us to be as human beings.

The Apostle Paul wrote of the Law (a way of describing God's rules) ...

Its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands.

i.e. it's not the way, because no one can live up to it perfectly.

The law simply shows us how sinful we are. Romans 3:19-20 (NLT)

Now, it's a little counter-intuitive that this is a blessing because, on the surface, this sounds like a bad thing: "God's rules" serve not only to direct us in how to maximize our lives, but they also show us how fallen we are.

How can feeling bad about our shortcomings be a good thing?

Paul explains:

The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Galatians 3:24 (NIV)

If we didn't have the rules to help us see that we are fallen, we would never turn to the savior, Jesus.

And it's the law – God's rules – that reveal our need. And it's the fact that we can't keep that law perfectly that causes us, once we realize that, to long for a better way, "God is there a solution somewhere, because I know I cannot live up to the perfect standard"; the law causes us to long for the better way of faith in what Christ did for us on the cross and in his resurrection.

So, in this counter-intuitive way, God's rules are a blessing, even though they serve to reveal how fallen we are.

Rules as Curse

Now, at this point, if you're a Christian, you're probably thinking "yep, that's what I've always thought. God's rules are a blessing because they're the right rules for the right reason, and the fact that I fail to keep them pointed (and *still* points) me to my need for Christ. So, Rick, I don't think we Christians need to apologize to anyone for trying to keep these rules as best we can and even encouraging others to do so.

"In fact, since those rules are intended as a blessing, it would be evil and immoral for us *not to share them* with the rest of the world, wouldn't it? I mean, don't you think this world would be a lot better place if people knew and actually tried to follow the Ten Commandments? If people made a commitment to Christ and the Church and actually tried to live by those commitments?"

Absolutely, I do. But ... I think that can be overdone. And I think we need to be careful because the Bible tells us that something really good can become really bad – a blessing can become a curse – if it's used in the wrong way. And when it comes to God's rules – the moral authority of the scripture and especially our own convictions about such things – they can easily be used in the wrong way, *especially with respect to others*.

The Bible says there are two ways that this happens.

1. God's rules can be – and are – a curse when they are used to exalt self.

And the way we do that is to take how poorly others keep the rules and lay that along side how well we're keeping the rules, and we think, "hey, look at me, I'm doing great!"

And, we saw a vivid example of this last week.

"Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer:

'I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. [then he started listing all the rules] For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! [my list is way better than his list] I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.'

But remember what Jesus said?

"I tell you, this sinner [the tax collector], not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:10-14 (NLT)

God's rules are a curse when they are used to exalt self in comparison to others because, when you look at other people and their failings, you tend to minimize how bad you really are. And when you do that, *your* sense of need for and dependence on Christ begins to lessen and you lose sight of the gospel that says "I am far worse than I would ever believe but God loves and accepts me far more than I can imagine."

And when that happens to you (and to me) you're in big trouble as a Christian, because it's the Gospel that gives us power to live as God has called us to live. That's why this is so dangerous. That's why I call this a curse.

But, there's a second way in which God's moral authority can be misused with respect to others and become a curse instead of a blessing ...

2. God's rules (and our convictions – I'll explain that in a minute) are a curse when they are used to

condemn others.

Now, I've already said that one of the blessings of God's rules is that they reveal our fallenness (the gap between what we're supposed to be and what we really are), so, don't misunderstand what I'm saying, there is an *appropriate level* of conviction and even a sense of being condemned because we are disobedient. And, when we're aware of the rules, there should be a healthy sense of "that's true of me, I do not measure up."

But there's a big difference between letting God's Word do its work in us in that way and using it to hit people over the head; to condemn them; to make them feel as if God is against them or hates them, instead of Him loving them and desiring to show them kindness that leads them to repentance (as the scripture says).

The most obvious example I can think of is that group over in Topeka (I'm sure you've heard of them) that marches around with signs at funerals of gay men and women. It's not about a convicting thing with them; it's a hateful and condemning thing. And when used in that way, God's rules become a curse. I'm sure you can think of other examples.

But let's get a little closer to home. Because it's really easy to talk about people over in Topeka and fall into the same trap as they do. If we're not careful we can use God's rules to exalt ourselves and condemn them! So let's try not to do that.

Instead, let's think for a few minutes about relating to people who are in our own circle. Let's talk about relating to other Christians when it comes to our own personal convictions. And, I've alluded to this several times and I've tried to explain it. See, within the boundaries of the rules God gives us there is still a lot of personal choice that needs to be made. God doesn't direct every single move we make. God is not interested in making every little decision for you about your life. That's why you're a human being. That's why you have freedom. God doesn't care what color shirt you wear, for instance, or what style of music you listen to.

In fact, this is one of the reasons why (and I'm taking a little detour here) Christianity has been so successful in accommodating itself to a variety of cultures across the world where as other world religions have not. Tim Keller observes, "Around the core teachings (the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments) to which all forms of Christianity are committed, there is great freedom as to how to express and interpret these 'absolutes'. Christianity is not just Western, not limited racially or culturally; it has changed vastly over the centuries and it continues to display great vitality as it spreads and grows in places like Africa and China." Places you would never expect a religion that came out of the Near East to spread and expand.

Even though that's true, the problem is that humans have a tendency towards legalism, a set of "little rules" based on our cultural interpretations of God's big rules, for lack of a better term. Now, just to be real clear, there's nothing wrong with the "little rules." Everyone needs to develop their own convictions about things that are not expressly spelled out in the Bible. Things like convictions about smoking, or drinking alcohol, dancing, gambling, whatever – the kinds of things that Mr. Watkins wanted to know about.

The problem is – legalism is – when we assign those little rules the same level of importance as the big rules. And when that happens, suddenly, here's what it looks like, it now becomes a bigger sin to us to have a beer than it is to ignore a homeless person because we're just too busy or we're afraid they might be scamming everybody. That's what legalism does – it flips the values so that the little things we've come up with become way more important than the big things God has already revealed clearly.

And that's bad enough at the individual level, but it gets even worse when individual Christians get together with other Christians who have similar convictions about those things and they form churches (which is the answer to the question of "why do different churches have different rules?"). I mean, people have convictions then they find each other and get together and form churches.

Now, I say that that is worse, but it doesn't *have* to be worse. To be very clear, there's nothing wrong with a group of Christians deciding together, "hey, we're not going to go to R-rated movies (for instance) because we don't want to put that stuff in our minds.

We're going to make a deal, just between the 2 of us or the 5 of us, to not do this. And let's hold each other accountable that we're not going to do this." And so, the 5 of us are going to do it, then the 10 of us are going to do it, then the 50 of us, then the 100 or the 500 or the 1,000. Now you have a church of people who are together saying this is what we believe is true. And, there is nothing wrong with that.

The problem is when that voluntary agreement now becomes the standard by which other Christians, who do not have the same conviction, and non-Christians, who have maybe no conviction, are judged and condemned. And that is just wrong. And, I think it breaks God's heart and, I think it's a huge part of the reason why the world looks at Christians and thinks we're so petty and so stupid and whatever else you want to put on it.

Fortunately for us, we are not without biblical wisdom on how to solve this problem, because this cultural thing has been an issue since day one. Back in Paul's day, there was a big to-do (and we kind of heard a reference to this in the skit) over whether or not it was OK to eat meat sold in the marketplace that had previously been offered to an idol in one of the temples in a worship service. It had been cooked on the altar (they had a fire and offered sacrifices) and then the leftovers were taken to the meat market and sold to whoever wanted to buy meat. So what happened was some Christians, who knew about that process, said, "oh no, this is terrible. If you buy and eat that meat, you're supporting idolatry. You're putting your money into idolatry. And, worse than that, it could be because that was offered to some pagan god there could be demonic oppression in that and you could be ingesting demons when you eat that..." They had this whole thing built up in their head and it really bothered them. Others thought, "We know the truth. An idol is nothing; it's just a hunk of stone. We know that there is only one true God and we know his name. His name is Jesus. So this meat is no different than any other meat. You should be able to eat it in good conscience."

So, listen to what the Apostle Paul wrote to them:

Accept him whose faith is weak [Whose faith is weak? It would be the person who felt like "We need to stay away from this." Those of you who have a bigger view, you accept that person whose faith is weak], *without passing judgment on disputable matters* [and this was a disputable matter - is it okay or not okay to do this?] *One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.*

Here is the conclusion:

The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not ["I feel like I'm better and something is wrong with him"], *and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.*

And, here's the punchline:

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? [the implication here is, these people are all serving God. Who are you to put yourself in the place of God and judge God's servant] *To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand* [even in that conviction]. *Romans 14:1-4*
(NIV)

Paul's point (and I think God said it too!): don't condemn the people who have different convictions over the little things.

Paul was also concerned that after he wrote this that people then would start getting arrogant about the fact that nobody could be saying anything to them and they'd be walking around saying, "hey, see, Paul says right here, you can't tell me what I'm supposed to do. If I want to have a beer, you can't say anything about it. If I want to have a smoke, you can't say anything about it. Shut up." But Paul has a word for them, too.

It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

Here's what he is saying - some of your brothers and sisters struggle with this. So, don't invite them over and flaunt the fact that

you're so spiritual that you can have a beer, or that you can eat this meat, or whatever. Or, that you can watch an R-rated movie and it doesn't bother you. Don't flaunt that in front of them. Don't make a big deal out of your freedom, because it's better to not do that, than to cause your brother to say, "oh, it's okay for me now," and then he starts doing this thing and then his conscience gets all screwed up.

Then, the concluding line is:

*So whatever you believe about these things [right or wrong] keep it between yourself and God.
Romans 14:21-22 (NIV)*

A nice way of saying "shut up." Don't argue over the little stuff. Don't make a big deal over the little stuff.

So, God's rules (and our convictions in these "grey areas") are a curse when used to exalt ourselves and to condemn others.

But as bad as that is, there's something even worse that can happen.

3. God's rules are a curse when they are used as a substitute for a relationship with him.

They are a curse when we use them as a substitute for a relationship with him. See, the way human beings are wired (and we're all like this), it's easier to trust rules than it is to trust God. It's easier to develop convictions about these cultural things, really think it through with all the implications - "this I'm going to do; this I'm not going to do; this I can sometimes do" - and, you have this whole grid and you think that because you have this grid and you're abiding by this grid that you have a good relationship with God. That is when the rules become a curse.

In fact, one day, Jesus had a discussion with a group of people who thought that way. They thought that because that's how they were doing it, they had a good relationship with God. And it says that one of them...

An expert in the law tested him [Jesus] with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" [Which one of the little rules or the big rules is the best one?]

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." *Matthew 22:35-40 (NIV)*

Jesus answer had nothing to do with tithing or dancing or wine or not stealing or reading your Bible, or anything else you want to put on your list of rules. It had to do with your relationship with God and with people.

See, even though there *are* "rules", the point is, Christianity is not primarily about rules. It's about a relationship. And we Christians get that messed up - a lot. And it hurts the world around us; I think it pushes them away from us and from Jesus.

I'm sure you've heard the one about the guy who was standing outside of a church looking in the window when Jesus walked up and stood beside him. The man said, "Jesus, I don't get it. I've been trying to get into this church for a long time but I don't fit in. I don't act like they do, I don't dress like they do and I don't vote like they do."

Jesus shook his head and said, "Tell me about it. I've been trying to get into this church for a long time, too."

Even though there *are* "rules", Christianity isn't primarily about keeping the rules. It's about relationship. It's about love.

Beyond Rules

So, Christian or not, I think that in our thinking about God and Christianity, we need to move beyond rules to relationship; specifically, what it means to have a loving relationship with God.

But that's a challenging thing, too, because "love" in this culture is very nebulous. Love is something we all understand primarily as an emotion, something we may feel strongly one day and then it may kind of go away the next day. It's this up and down kind of thing.

So, for a just a few minutes as we wrap this up, I want to talk to you about love, and loving God and loving other people. I want to point out to you that most of us do this instinctively, but rarely think about. And I want to give credit to Keller for this, because he says this better than I can, so I'm going to largely quote him as we close this out.

1. To experience the joy and freedom of love, you must give up your personal autonomy.

And, you know this. You know that if you're going to love someone and experience the joy and freedom that comes from that love, you have to actually give up your rights to total freedom. There's no other way.

Keller writes:

One of the principles of love - either love for a friend or romantic love - is that you have to lose independence to attain greater intimacy. If you want the 'freedoms' of love - the fulfillment, the security, the sense of worth that it brings - you must limit your freedom in many ways...

"You cannot enter a deep relationship and still make unilateral decisions or allow your friend or lover no say in how you live your life. To experience the joy and freedom of love, you must give up your personal autonomy."⁶

And, as I've been thinking about this, I thought of something that Jetta and I discovered early on (or that I discovered early on - she already knew all the answers. It took me a long time to come along). Early on in our marriage, to me, personal autonomy when I get up in the morning is - I'm just going to leave the bed however I want it. I don't care, I mean, who needs to make a bed? But for her, how she is wired, she wants the room neat. It means something to her. So, finally I realized that if I love her, then I'm going to make the bed. Not because it's a "rule", not because I'm going to get in trouble, but because if you want to have that love relationship with a person, you have to give up your own personal autonomy. Now, what's interesting is, over the years, the more she knows me and loves me, she realizes that there are some days that I just don't make the bed, for whatever reason. And, she kind of like backs off and gives up some of her personal autonomy so that we can have a loving relationship.

Which leads to this next point, which is...

For a love relationship to be healthy there must be a *mutual* loss of independence. It can't be just one way. Both sides must say to the other, "I will adjust to you. I will change for you. I'll serve you even though it means a sacrifice for me." If only one party does all the sacrificing and giving, what do we call that - we may call that "co-dependence" or we may even call that an abusive or oppressive relationship that develops eventually.

Now listen to how this applies to our relationship with God:

"At first sight, then, a relationship with God seems inherently dehumanizing. Surely it will have to be 'one way,' God's way. God, the divine being, has all the power. I must adjust to God - there is no way that God could adjust to and serve me..."

“In the most radical way, God has adjusted to us - in his incarnation and atonement. In Jesus Christ he became a limited human being, vulnerable to suffering and death. On the cross, he submitted to our condition - as sinners - and died in our place to forgive us.

In the most profound way, God has said to us, in Christ, ‘I will adjust to you. I will change for you. I’ll serve you though it means a sacrifice to me.’”⁷

2. Jesus gave up his freedom out of love.

That’s what all that is saying. Jesus gave up his freedom out of love. He submitted himself to us out of love.

As Paul puts it:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross. Philippians 2:6-8 (NLT)

Now, why is this important? Because God isn’t asking us to do anything he didn’t already do himself.

That’s why true Christianity could never be a straitjacket imposed by a legalistic God. If it’s a straitjacket at all, it is a self-imposed straitjacket.

See, once we realize that God himself straitjacketed himself with human flesh (through Jesus) and sacrificed his divine freedom because he loves us, then our only natural response to his love is complete surrender of our own freedom. Keller explains: “Once you realize how Jesus changed for you and gave himself for you, you aren’t afraid of giving up your freedom and therefore finding your freedom in him.”⁸

As Paul put it:

Christ’s love controls [constrains] us ... He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (NLT)

Why would Christians straitjacket themselves? Because they love—they love God who first loved them.

Conclusion

And, I hope this morning, no matter how you came in here, whether you’re a Christian or you’re just checking this out and you’re not quite there yet, I hope that you see that this is what it’s about. It’s not about rules; it’s about relationship. It’s about loving God.

As we close, I’m going to ask the band to come up and I’m going to pray for you. I know we all come in to these services in different places and we have different thoughts on our minds, so I want to pray for you. Let’s pray that God will make things clear.

Baptism is coming up on the 15th & 16th of next month.

ENDNOTES

¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian*, pg1

² *Ibid*, pg 222

³ Keller, Pg 45

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Keller, pg 47

⁶ Timothy Keller, The Reason for God (47-49)

⁷ Keller, Reason for God (49)

⁸ http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~ichthus/issues/4.2/article.php?page=review_chung