

Oh Behave!

By Pastor Greg
4-20-08

Colossians 3:12,14-15

Bunkertown COB

We moved into the new house when I was in the third grade. On the first day of school my younger sister and I walked about a mile to school! Ghastly thought, isn't it? But unbeknown to us there were certain rules one had to follow when walking to school. Did you know that there is a correct side of the road you are to walk on? We picked the right side which wasn't the right side, right? So Billy-better-than-you runs and tells Mr. Hess (the principal) that we had walked on the wrong side of the road. And thus began my life of crime; a childhood that always seemed to be out of step with the law. It seems that I was constantly setting in the chair just outside of the principals' office (singing "Jesus keep me near the cross"). You should have seen the size of his paddle. There were so many rules I went crazy just trying to keep up ("What do you mean there's no talking in the hallway on our way out to recess. You mean I'm in trouble just because I kicked the ball over the fence? It was just a tiny little stone and I didn't hit anyone with it anyway!") Me and the chalk board, we became good friends. And I knew just about every inch of that front corner of the classroom.

Not much has changed. There are new rules being created every day. Did you know there is now a law that says you must turn on your headlights every time you run your windshield wipers? What if you're just washing the windshield? And we're not supposed to talk on our cell phones while driving (sure, now they tell us, after years of watching Magnum, P.I. talking to Higgins while he drove around in that Ferrari).

Well, to make matters worse, even the Bible is filled with a long list of rules; things we cannot do, things we cannot eat, things we cannot touch, and things we cannot say. There are laws in the Bible about who to talk with, where to go, about washing your hands after you go to the bathroom, about who to hang out with, what to eat, about where to go to church, when to go to church, HOW to worship in church, what offerings to give, about how to cook your food, what to do with the leftovers, how to pray, what to do if there is mold in your house or a mole on your

nose, and on and on the list grows. By most counts, there were 617 Old Testament laws that a person needed to remember in order to live a correct life.

Sometime around 300 B.C. a group of men began to devote themselves to strictly following all these laws. We know them as Pharisees. Being a Pharisee was like belonging to a certain Denomination. They were Jews who were Pharisees (like we are Christians who are Brethren). The New Testament leads us to believe that these men thought that keeping all these laws would make them right with God. The Apostle Paul used to be a part of this group.

If you read much of what Paul wrote in the New Testament, it might seem like he still hung on to this whole idea of keeping rules. At the end of Galatians 5 he lists what we know as the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹). In Ephesians 4 we are told to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love.”² In Philippians 2 he says to “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.”³ And then there is the verse for this weekend found in Colossians 3.¹² Since God chose you to be the holy people He loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.¹⁴ Even more than all this, clothe yourself in love. Love is what holds you all together in perfect unity.⁴ (Colossians 3:12, 14)

It seems like Paul is constantly giving us a list of rules to follow since we have identified ourselves with Christ. And most of us have a sense of responsibility to possess these attitudes and to behave in such a way that our lives might honor Christ. It is, after all, the way a Christian is supposed to act. To reinforce these characteristics of a Christian, teachers and pastors and church leaders bombard us with a long tirade of “Thou Shall Not’s” or offer an endless supply of workshops and seminars. They are trying to teach us how to behave; telling us these things

¹*The Revised Standard Version*. 1971 (Ga 5:22). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Eph 4:1-2). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

³*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Php 2:3-4). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁴Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Col 3:12). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

constantly so our minds will be filled with thoughts of good behavior and good attitude. But Paul, once the Pharisee, knows better. That's why he adds something a little more here in Colossians 3; a statement that we often overlook because we're so hung up on getting these proper attitudes and behaviors in place. Notice what he says in verse 15. ¹⁵ **Let the peace that Christ gives control your thinking, because you were all called together in one body to have peace. Always be thankful.** ⁵ (Colossians 3:14-15) Why do you think he would throw in that phrase "Let Christ control your thinking"? Why do you think he would finish up this list with the idea that we should let Christ "Rule in our hearts"? Because Paul knew that head knowledge is a poor way to change the attitude of a person's heart.

Of all people, Paul would understand that knowing and following these laws is NOT what made a person a Christian. Strict adherence to the laws did not keep the Pharisees from murder (which was against the law), from ignoring people in need, or from turning a blind eye to injustice. No, Paul understood that Jesus did not die on the cross so you and I can learn how to act like a Christian but so that we can be transformed into a Christian through the power of the Holy Spirit. That's why he told the church in Corinth **"anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"** ⁶ And this will only happen in a heart that is surrendered and broken; a heart where Christ may rule.

However, I'm beginning to realize that most of us are no different than these Pharisees. Really! Most of us sitting here today still believe that good teaching or right instruction is what the people of this world need. For most of us, we feel that the transfer of knowledge is what helps us become better Christians. But knowledge will not change a person's heart. We don't need more sermons on why we should be tenderhearted, kind, humble, gentle, and patient. What we need is for our hearts to become surrendered to the work of the Holy Spirit instead of resting comfortably in all our acquired knowledge.

Take this weekend for example. The idea presented is that people will know we are Christians by the manner of our living. And your parents or youth leaders

⁵*The Everyday Bible : New Century Version*. 2005 (Col 3:14-15). Nashville, TN.: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

⁶Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (2 Co 5:17). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

have encouraged you to come and learn more about this subject. The hope is that some teaching will transform you into a Christian who looks like what Paul described here in Colossians. So we've filled our heads with another list of Christian attitudes. And I can just see us out in the world. We keep this list filed away in our mind, ready to pull out a reminder the moment it's needed. But if that is all that has happened then we have become a group of believers with empty chests. Oh, our heads may be full, but nothing has filled our heart. There has been nothing broken inside. We've not been changed; we've only learned to behave like a proper Christian.

On our own we will only know that we should be these things. But if we let Christ rule in our heart He will help us become these things. So that's why I don't believe we need more workshops or seminars or insight sessions to teach us these things. You see, God has declared through the prophet Jeremiah **"I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."**⁷ God's not looking for people who know how to act like a Christian; His desire is to help us become a Christian. And in order to "become", we need hearts that are willing to be changed and transformed. We need to admit to ourselves that the only way someone will know Christ dwells within us is to stop filling our heads with smarts, and instead spend time on our knees begging God to fill our hearts.

⁷*The Revised Standard Version*. 1971 (Je 31:33). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.