

## Joel 2:12-13

“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Rend your heart and not your garments.

I want to talk to you this morning about our tendency to follow the rules rather than the one who made the rules.

Illustration: A bank teller who wasn't willing to validate his parking because he didn't make a business transaction. His name was John Akers. CEO of IBM.

This is a good picture of what happens when we consider the letter of the law over the Lord! There are more important things than the letter of the law, which is the heart of the law.

The Pharisees were critical about Jesus healing a person on the Sabbath. Why? Because, they were more concerned that the Sabbath be observed than they were about a person being healed.

The one thing that snuffs out a desperate desire for God's presence quicker than anything else is legalism and at the heart of legalism is self-reliance; which brings us back to Joel 2.

- Notice what is said here, “return to me with all your heart.” Husbands have you ever looked passionately into your wife's eyes and said “I love you with most of my heart?” If you're a smart man the answer is NO!!
- King David's advice to his son Solomon was this, “And you my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thought.”
- Here is a thought for you, religious activity doesn't equal relationship!! Try telling that to the pastors wife who feels completely abandoned because her husband's mistress is the ministry. We can love our religion more than we love The Lord!!!

- Why is that? Because we can follow rules with our own efforts and declare “what a good boy am I” but when you enter into a relationship with Christ He says, “You must die to live.”
- Notice what Jesus said to the rich young ruler: The young man approached Jesus and said, “I have kept the commandments since my youth, what more do I need to do to receive eternal Life?” Jesus said, “Sale all that you have, give it to the poor and come and follow me.”
- We flock to religion but forsake the Savior because we love to marvel at what we can do. Notice what the young ruler said; “I have followed,” “What more must I do?” He is looking for a “to do list” rather than seeking out the Savior!
- I’m not against rules or the Law, Jesus said “I did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill the Law. But when the rules become more important than Jesus we have a problem!!
- Listen again to Joel 2”Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”
- You can’t possibly weep, fast, and mourn if you are a rule follower. Only Christ followers do that.
  - Vs 13 “Rend your heart and not your garments.”
- In Jewish culture, to show a sign of mourning or humility Jews would put on sack cloth. This is made from coarse camel hair and primarily used for making sacks. Jews would also use their hands to rip the sack cloth as a sign of repentance. But here we see God telling them to “rend their hearts and not their garments.”

- Sack cloth are a dime a dozen but you only have one heart. Psalms 51:17 says “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken spirit and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”
- The reason why the multitudes don’t get this concept is because Christ was never their “One and only,” He was just “One of many.” When we compare our relationship with him to anyone else there should be no competition.
- We should NEVER be bound by rules or our church or denomination or our opinion but instead we should be captivated by his face, changed by his grace and transformed by his life giving Word.
  - Be lovers of Christ!!