

Why don't we follow the rules?

The last 9 months have seen unprecedented rules imposed on us, from what we can do in our own homes, to what we wear when we are in shops, how far we can travel and exercise when we can exercise. Rules can be seen as a very blunt tool and the assumption is that they should be easy to follow. But they are rarely black and white. Take the face mask rule, you have to wear a face mask in a shop, unless you are under 11 years old, or have a medical reason not to wear one (there can be many many medical reasons why people cannot wear them). What looks like a simple rule is in fact less black and white and more messy grey. I'm sure you can think of other rules that are not quite as straightforward as they first seemed, just ask a parent with some young children!

I have to be honest and say that over the last 9 months I would have broken the rules quite a few times, and in fact then broken the law more times this year than ever before! I'm sure I could explain away why I bent the rules, just like you would be able to if you were ever questioned. Rules then are not simple but rather complicated. We are also very good at selectively obeying them, choosing how best to bend them, then judging other people for doing the same thing. It is easy to get cross at that person for leaving dog mess on the rec, then accidentally doing the same thing (we don't have a dog so it wasn't me!).

In the Old Testament of the Bible, God gave his people some simple rules, the 10 Commandments. Then God's people started setting out more rules to help everyone stay within the commandments. Many verses in scripture go on to explain in details how to follow them - that's why the bible has some strange rules about shellfish, sex and mildew! When Jesus came along he had some strong words about these rules and ended up breaking many of them. He said some famous phrases like "you worry about the speck of wood in your friend's eye but ignore the plank in your own". We can all be guilty of picking on someone for breaking the rules when we ourselves have done similar. The news does it all the time, it's their bread and butter; as I'm writing this there is an online debate raging on whether Boris Johnson broke the rules to go for a cycle ride in the Olympic Park. I wonder how many of those commenting have done similar things?

Jesus' answer was to focus less on the rules and more on the heart. A heart focused on loving others does what is best for other people whatever the rules might say. A heart focused on love thinks of other people through eyes full of compassion rather than judgementalism. Jesus lived this out and ultimately died to prove the point.

I pray that we would follow the rules as best we can, but I also pray that we would have a heart full of love and compassion for our community, showing grace in these strange pandemic days and being honest about the 'planks of wood' we walk around with. God Bless

- Martin Cockerill