

Breaking All The Rules

Are you a rule follower, or do you consider the rules made to be broken?

My brother has three wonderful children - a son, flanked by two daughters. They are gifted, creative, winsome, and love Jesus. Also, all three of them enjoy playing card games, board games, as well as the occasional video game. Out of the three, however, my nephew is the most difficult to play with, especially when he was younger. He consistently had an advantage, especially if the game was new or entirely unfamiliar. Why, you might ask? Well, though he would explain the game before starting, he would, without fail, change or add rules that would give him an advantage. These rule changes guaranteed that the game's outcome would inevitably favor his hand, his game pieces, or his point total. They would ultimately aid him in snatching victory from the jaws of defeat. Whether it was Uno, Monopoly, or Mario Smash Brothers, rest assured, I would be taken to the cleaners.

Luke introduced the Pharisees into his narrative for the first time when the Son of Man healed a paralytic man of his ailment and forgave him of his sin (Lk 5:17-26). After these "extraordinary things" (v. 26), this group became an integral fixture in Jesus' life. According to historians and theologians, the Pharisees were a small group of perhaps 7000 that was devoted to Scripture and obedience to the Law. They identified with the judgment that Israel had endured as consequences of its rebellion and idolatry resulting in the destruction of the temple and the Babylonian exile in 586 BC. Consequently, the Pharisees were fundamentalists, sticklers for the details, and contending with many other Jewish groups that were liberals, politicians, revolutionaries, or ascetics. They were not only the observers of the rules, but their enforcers and, often, their creators. As a matter of fact, rather than the two commands Jesus stressed (Mk 12:30-31), **the Pharisees had developed a system of 613 laws - a set of rules that had produced a heartless, cold, and arrogant brand of righteousness that cared more about external appearances than a change of the heart.**

Jesus flips their entire religious system on its head! As Jesus eats with sinners and tax collectors (Lk 5:27-32), the Pharisees are appalled that this rabbi would break bread with such cheats and lowlifes. Furthermore, as Jesus' disciples enjoy eating and drinking (Lk 5:33-39), the Pharisees are confused that they are showing little solemnity and piety. Finally, as Jesus is active on the Sabbath (Lk 6:1-11), the Pharisees are infuriated that He would have the audacity to break this holy day. How could Jesus not understand and obey the rules - **their** rules? Ah, and isn't that

where the problem lies? We so easily forget that when it comes to seeking, saving, and sanctifying sinners, **God** makes, demonstrates, and enforces the rules.

The Son of Man is the Physician who **gives life** to the sick. He is the Bridegroom who **brings joy** to His followers. And, He is the Lord of the Sabbath who **gives rest** to the weary. The rules of Jesus are not burdensome as are the rules of men (Matt 11:28-30). They are truly good news, since they are offered to the unworthy and undeserving. They are comforting, for their demands are met by their Provider.

Do you see yourself always on the right side of the rules? Are they your rules or are they Jesus' rules? If they are your rules they will leave you sin-sick, joyless, and restless. Furthermore, you will project your rules upon others, leaving them miserable and empty. However, if the rules are Jesus' rules, anchored in His Word, they will bring glory to your Heavenly Father and good news to your neighbor, because they give life, and joy, and rest. And, by the way, His rules never change. They will always be gifts of grace... You could say they aren't rules at all!

Matthew 9:10-13 (ESV) - *“And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ But when he heard it, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’”*