



Freedom from Rules

How rules distract us from what really matters



Introduction

How have rules held you back from having a free and real relationship with God?

Whether or not you grew up religious, it can be easy to see God and Christianity as a bunch of rules to follow. As I grew up going to church, I didn't think much of these rules; I just did what my family did without a second thought. But as I got older, I started to feel more and more resistant to the rules I felt were in place around my life. I started to question what I had grown so accustomed to and often felt stuck. Why do I have to go to church? Why do I have to read my Bible, why can't I do whatever I want whenever I want? It felt impossible to see God as anything except the enforcer of these rules, even though the Bible portrays him differently.

But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey



all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law." [11] So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

- Galatians 3:10-11 NLT

God actually says it's impossible to have a relationship with him through following rules, because it's impossible to follow every rule perfectly. This means that when I get so caught up in what I'm supposed to do or not do, I'm going to continue to feel frustrated and stuck until I decide to break free from rules and have an actual and genuine relationship with God.

This study is going to look at the two types of people we become when we get tied down by rules, and how to break free so we focus on what really matters.

1. The Rule Follower

Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: [21] "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? [22] These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. [23] Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

- Colossians 2:20-23 NIV

- As the scripture says, the rule follower is someone who makes everything about having the right behavior. Rule followers are usually judgmental, expecting not only themselves but the people around them to follow the rules that have been set.
- They are often hyper-fearful, terrified that they'll mess up or do something wrong, and if they do, they sink into guilt and self-loathing. Rule followers always want to keep the peace ([Ezekiel 13:10](#)), and only feel content if people approve of their behavior.
- But as Colossians warns, all of this rule-keeping is not enough to deal with any heart issues, like sensual indulgence.
- Does this describe you?

2. The Rule Breaker

...these people are stubborn rebels who refuse to pay attention to the LORD's instructions. [10] They tell the seers, "Stop seeing visions!" They tell the prophets, "Don't tell us what is right. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies. [11] Forget all this gloom. Get off your narrow path. Stop telling us about your 'Holy One of Israel.'" [12] This is the reply of the Holy One of Israel: "Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in oppression and lies, [13] calamity will come upon you suddenly— like a bulging wall that bursts and falls. In an instant it will collapse and come crashing down. [14] You will be smashed like a piece of pottery— shattered so completely that there won't be a piece big enough to carry coals from a fireplace or a little water from the well."

-Isaiah 30:9-14 NLT

- Like Isaiah says, rule breakers hate anyone telling them what to do. They often look down on and think they are better than the rule followers, criticizing their conformity or religiosity.
- Rule breakers are very bitter people, because, like the scripture says, they are sick of being told “what is right” or what to do. They always have someone, whether it be people or God, to blame for why they are unhappy or not getting what they want. They question everything, not with the intent to understand, but rather to argue and defend their own wants and opinions.
- Though rule breakers criticize rule followers for being fake, they themselves refuse to deal with the hard truths in their hearts.
- Does this describe you?

I have been both the rule follower and the rule breaker countless times, and they are actually a lot more alike than either would want to admit. Both the follower and the breaker make their entire focus rules and behavior so that they don't have to acknowledge or deal with their hearts.

The more I refuse to see and deal with what's in my heart, the more I feel like God and people are trying to get me to follow rules. The things I don't want to deal with could be sin that I feel guilty about; emotions about family, friendships, or my future; or even desires I have that I haven't been honest about. Whatever is in my heart needs to come out in conversation with God and friends if I am going to get freed from rules and have a real relationship with God.

- What parts of your heart have you been refusing to deal with?
- How has this refusal led you to be more focused on rules?

I Am Not Going to Go Back on That

What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So I quit being a "law man" so that I could be God's man. Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not "mine," but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I am not going to go back on that. Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God's grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily.

- Galatians 2:19-21 MSG

- In this scripture, Paul sees the real danger in focusing on rules. When our focus becomes rules, whether following or breaking them, we actually choose to reject personal and free relationships.
- The whole reason Jesus died on the cross was so that we wouldn't be held back by having to keep rules and doing everything right. So when we go back to feeling the need to do everything perfectly, we are essentially saying that Jesus died on the cross for no reason, and everything he's done for us is pointless.
- Do you view focusing on rules as detrimental as God does?
- How has focusing on rules impacted your relationships?

The Only Rule that Matters

“Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?” [37] Jesus replied, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ [38] This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ [40] The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

- Matthew 22:36-40 NLT

- God wants us to stop trying to be perfect and following rules so that we can be freed up to follow the only rule that matters - loving him and loving people.
- When we fixate on all the rules and boundaries that we feel trapped by, we miss out on the point of it all. How has focusing on rules stopped you from loving?
- Who can you choose to love today?