

# Following the Rules or Not

by Roger Day

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My earliest first-hand experience with the frustrating behavior of human beings took place at school when I was in first grade. It had snowed, and it was time for recess. The teacher divided the class into two groups, and chose me to be one of the group leaders. My assignment was to lead my group in a single file through the snow to first make a circle, and then divide it into pie slices. It started out well.

I made a large circle, with the long line of my fellow students trudging behind me. This was great – they were all following me! So next, it was to be divided into pie slices. I turned and headed for the center of the circle. At this point, the group broke up. They started making their own pie slices. I was aghast - my leadership had been abandoned! My classmates were all out of order and clearly having great fun making their own pie slices. I yelled, but no one cared.

Because of my impressionable age, this experience had a lasting affect upon me. It was certainly like having a bucket of cold water thrown on one's trust in the behavior of others. It wasn't but a couple years later that I overheard talk of a policeman who had been arrested for a crime. This was staggering news to me at my young age. Policemen were supposed to catch criminals, not be criminals - another bucket of cold water! And as time went by, I learned very well that folks like to go their own way, not following any rules that would crimp their style. And I became guilty of this same behavior – fancy that – just as human as everyone else!

Most human beings don't really want to change for the better, and don't really want to put out that much effort to be good. They tend to do only what they think they really must do. They don't want to face their weaknesses, really bare their soul to God, or really care all that much about others. Most would rather keep God at arm's length, if not entirely out of the picture. Human beings seek their own comfort level, and follow their own spirits, instead of God's spirit.

The activity of this world starkly contrasts with the attitudes and behavior encouraged by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7). Folks scurry around, storing up treasure on the earth instead of in Heaven - just opposite of what Jesus preached. Few seek to be pure in heart, merciful, peacemakers, charitable, the salt of the earth, or a light in the world. They are hardly thinking about anything Jesus said, should they have ever read it, and it bears rereading from time to time. Meditating on Bible teachings is important, but most folks are simply too busy, filling any available time with selfish endeavors.

In Matthew 7:12, Jesus laid down the principal that has been termed The Golden Rule, usually phrased as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." What Christ actually spoke was, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." And in Matthew 22:39, Christ affirmed, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

The Golden Rule is often forwarded as a chief guide for how human relations are to be conducted. Responsible parents repeat it to their children. By putting ourselves in the place of the other person, we can more justly determine how to act in relation to them. One would not commit a crime against someone if they put themselves in the position of their victim - were they to follow the Golden Rule - were they to love their neighbor.

Ignoring good rules, our carnal nature has its own rule to put self first, even if it is at the expense of others. Ironically, that self-interest often turns out to be personally destructive, as well as bad for the other party. Everyone loses. You could say that our carnal nature just isn't very bright. In this world, the Golden Rule gets some lip service, but not near enough application. It's said that folks want their neighbors to follow the Golden Rule, while they prefer to be exempt from it. To the degree that everyone follows particular rules, everyone benefits. Most rules of civil society provide benefit, and many of them are based on rules and principles found in the Bible. And of course our prisons are full of rule breakers.

God created the human race, set that race in motion to multiply into the billions, and saw to it that an instruction book, the Bible, was provided to tell folks how they could live beneficially with one another. It doesn't seem that too many folks pour through the Bible to learn its guidance and rules for successful living. Yet it deserves the greatest respect, considering that our Creator inspired it to be written. It's the most important instruction book that lots of folks own, but too few read and study.

The Bible contains direct instructions, explanations of what could go wrong, and examples of what various parties either learned or didn't learn from experience. But just because all that guidance is there in writing, this does not keep human beings from breaking out of line and choosing their own paths. Some ignore or abandon the instructions. Others create desired comfort zones by making their own interpretations. Many want no more than one slice of that Bible pie, thank you. Some don't want any. Besides failing to consider the position of other folks before they act, humans likewise hardly think about how their actions are viewed by God. They seem unaware that God could know their thoughts.

It turns out that we can also apply the principal of the Golden Rule to our relations with God. Jesus stated in Matthew 22:37-38 that the greatest rule was, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." We need only ask a few questions. How does God want to be treated by us? Does God want to hear from us, or be ignored? Does God deserve worship and honor? What could we do to please God? Surely these are reasonable questions to ask. And in fact, there is plenty we can do to honor and serve God in our prayers and in our actions. In Matthew 25:34-40, Jesus said that if we helped those in need, He would consider that we did it to Him.

The rules found in the Bible are certainly specific, and the principal of love behind them should not be difficult to grasp. The rules are there for our benefit, not to annoy us and make our lives difficult. Yet a number of folks claim that the rules are mostly done away. Why? This selfish view allows folks to be free of constraints on how they want to live. At first blush, claiming that the rules are done away seems pretty gutsy to me. But it is only gutsy if someone making that claim also really believes the following points to be both true and important.

- God exists.
- God is all powerful.
- It matters what God thinks.
- Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess before God.
- Your neighbor, created to be in the image of God, should also matter.

I doubt that the above points find their way into the conscious thought of many persons. Yet in their time, they will become well known to every human being. In order to avoid explaining one's selfish choices, I recommend repenting prior to facing the Lord. In fact, the sooner the better. Further, partner with God to be transforming from a carnal selfish person to one more in harmony with God.

Men cannot truly change or cancel the rules which God has ordained and put in force. Of course any number of religious entities have justified such changes. Men also invent different scenarios of future events, and some will continue to scheme to create some type of world government. But the final world order will be instituted by Jesus Christ after His return.

So the rules are in force every day. The Golden Rule is a real rule, as are many others. When one does good, there are positive results (though sometimes it is not appreciated). When one tramples on others, there are negative results. Being in harmony with the rules leads us to be in harmony with God. While not a Christian, Ghandi observed, "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." Indeed, we really need the rules to be a part of who we are, having them in our minds and hearts. And that just happens to be the essence of the New Covenant, found in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 8:6-13.

Sadly, too few human beings seem to have internalized many virtues, rules, and principles. It seems that few have thought all that deeply about life, God, and eternity. This doesn't make sense, since it is pretty clear that all humans die. Every day, we become tired and go to sleep. This reminds us that we have limited strength, and need renewal. Crawling under the covers can be a reminder that we will die. In fact, death is likened to sleep in many scriptures. Then each morning that we wake up is a type of resurrection. This daily cycle should alert us to our need for God.

If God has anything to do with living beyond death, then serious investigation and effort should be in order. Determine which God is the true God, what is the nature of that God, and exactly what beneficial rules that God may have provided that should be studied and taken to heart. Indeed, God hopes we will identify with the rules and their benefits, and follow them because we want to, not because we have to. God judges the heart. And the rules simply point us toward how our heart should be motivated.

The good news is that every man, each in their own time and circumstance, will have a full opportunity to be saved. Each will be faced with the undeniable existence of God; will have their apparent blindness to God's rules removed; be given the spirit of God to aid their understanding; and be provided time to determine if they want to live accordingly. How merciful is that? If you were God, would you be this fair? God is!

God can't be happy with how most human beings are presently behaving. God wasn't happy with men in the days of Noah, and it is prophesied to be just as bad before Christ returns. The world certainly appears to be in a serious moral and spiritual crisis at this time, not to mention looming political and economic crises.

Yet God has a plan to reach everyone in order to fulfill His selfless vision of a glorious family of billions. Eternity will support the growth of countless relationships and activities in that loving family. I believe most all will repent, God will forgive, and they will live life as life was meant to be lived. Someday all human beings will be on the same page and follow the same rules, or they will be toast. Don't be toast - love the rules, love God, love your fellow man!

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