

LIVING ACCORDING TO THE RULES

INTRODUCTION

As Christians, we want to please our heavenly Father. Our desire should be to imitate Christ and not imitate the world.

This means that there are some things we can do, and some things we should not do. Sadly, the enemy has deceived Christianity into believing that Christianity is antiquated and outdated and that all we are is a bunch of hypocrites, living according to a set of rules and regulations.

This is what the world, inspired and edged on by Satan, shouts "It can't be about rules and regulations because that's "Law, and you're not under Law, you're under grace", and as a result, Christianity has abandoned, or watered down some of the rules and regulations God put in place for our good.

The truth is that Christianity is not about blindly following a set of rules; it's about relationship and love, however, Jesus also said, "If you love Me, you will obey me". Obedience implies that there are rules, and they must be followed, and by following them, we are also demonstrating our love for God.

Therefore, today, I want to take us back and remind us of some of those "rules" that we find in the New Testament which are so seldom preached about because "we are not under law but under grace". These are the rules that Christians need to live by and obey.

MESSAGE

WHY DO WE NEED RULES?

Picture a rugby team tackling players when they don't have the ball, or not stopping when the whistle is blown? What about a soccer team, picture them picking up the ball and running with it? Imagine if golfers didn't like where their ball landed so they just kick the ball into a more convenient position before playing their next shot?

Rules are necessary, whether it be in sport, in the workplace or when driving on the road. In 2 Timothy chapter 2, Paul writes to Timothy saying, "And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules."

DO RULES APPLY TO NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS?

2 Timothy 2:3-7 (NLT) Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. 5 And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. 6 And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor. 7 Think about what I am saying. The Lord will help you understand all these things.

Paul was addressing the Christian walk. He said, "there are things soldiers can't do, and things athletes have to do, and principles regarding farmers getting of the first fruit." Then he said, "think about this and the Lord will help you to understand".

Paul was effectively telling Timothy, "Timothy, live according to the rules, it's the price we pay as Christians – we need to be different!"

So yes, rules do apply to New Testament believers regardless of Romans 6:14 which says we are not under law but under grace.

DO RULES REMOVE OUR FREEDOM?

Galatians 5:13-15 (NLT) For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. 14 For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

Paul is making it very clear here that Christians do live in freedom:

- We have been called to live in freedom, but we are not to use that freedom to satisfy the sinful nature!
- Then he says, "walk in love", and he ties it back into the Law, stating that the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
- He was clearly addressing a problem: "But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another. "

What he is really saying is this: "Hey, you are under grace, but that doesn't mean you can live just as you please, live in love!"

Then Paul goes on to describe behaviour that is linked to the sinful nature and which has no place in the lives of those who live in freedom under grace:

Galatians 5:16-21 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. 17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. 18 But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses. 19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Church, the warning is clear, there are rules that we need to follow and there are certain things which, if we do them, will result in us being excluded from the Kingdom of God!

THE DESIRES OF THE SINFUL NATURE

I will briefly address the ones we hear about more often in the church and then I want to spend more time on two categories that we don't hear nearly enough about.

1. Sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures.

We speak about these things regularly in the church – we must remember that they have no place in our lives, this includes illicit sex, pornography, sexting, chat rooms etc. – The rule is: DON'T DO IT!

2. Idolatry.

Idolatry is anything that becomes more important in our lives than God.

Some less commonly recognised forms of idolatry:

- Putting our children before God.
- Choosing to go shopping instead of coming to church. I'm not speaking about when you simply have no other time to shop, I'm speaking about choosing to shop during regular church time, even though we have opportunity to do so at other times.
- Sports and hobbies.

The rule is: DON'T ALLOW THINGS TO BECOME IDOLS IN YOUR LIFE!

3. Our attitude towards others.

Paul said, "serve one another in love".

- Hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,
- I add gossip and taking offense!

Sometimes we think we can just do, or say as we please, but there are rules, and the greatest one is: "LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR!".

Church, we need to address our attitude, we often don't even think twice before saying something ugly or speaking negatively of others, but the truth is, there are rules to obey!

4. Envy

Envy is wanting what someone else has, regardless of its nature.

- Their spouse, their house, their car, their job, their calling.
- These things lead to hatred, bitterness, resentment, even murder.

We need to be content with what the Lord has given us. We must seek Him first and He will add to us whatever we need!

The rule is: BE CONTENT IN THE LORD!

5. Sorcery

Do you know the Biblical definition of sorcery? In **Deuteronomy 18:10-12**, many of the practices associated with sorcery are named for us: *"Let no one be found among you...who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD..."*

Where do we see these things manifest today?

- Divination – Manipulation from demonic sources – fortune telling, consulting witch doctors etc. and interpreting omens.
- Astrology – We either trust God or the Zodiac but not both – horoscopes are out. "What sign of the zodiac are you" – just say, I don't do that stuff!
- Witchcraft, witches and wizards – Including Wicca – a witch is a witch whether a white witch or a black witch – there is no good occult! Witchdoctors, shamans have no place in Christian lives!
- Casting spells – One who manipulates objects or beings via demonic power.
- Mediums or spiritists - consult with spirits – Those who claim to be in contact with the with the spiritual world or the dead are speaking to demons!
- Mysticism and self-actualisation – this is all New Age belief.
- Crystals and other items which seem to have energy or power – New Age.
- Freemasons, broederbond, secret societies – source is the pit of hell!
- Halloween – Seemingly innocent, then why is it a satanic high day?
- Any combination of Christianity with other religion – oil and water don't mix!

This is far from an exhaustive list! The rule is: HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT!

If you have been involved with any of these practices, you need to renounce, repent and be prayed for. Some deliverance may need to take place.

6. Drunkenness and wild partying

I could have separated these two but they often go together. The one will lead to the other – I will only focus on drunkenness.

What does the Bible say about drinking?

1. The Bible allows Christians to drink alcohol for medical reasons.

Paul told Timothy, "Stop drinking only water and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illness." (1 Timothy 5:23)

2. The Bible sometimes portrays alcohol as something enjoyable.

Jesus' first miracle involved turning water into wine for a wedding celebration. (John 2:3-11). Psalm 104 says, "He makes grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth; wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart." (v. 14-15)

3. The Bible forbids drunkenness.

Although the Bible never says that alcohol itself is sinful, it does say many times that drunkenness is a sin. God says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:6) In fact, there are many verses in the Bible which speak out against drunkenness. (For a few examples, see Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 4:3.)

The Bible forbids drinking if it offends fellow believers.

God explains in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 that we should be considerate of other Christians who have different convictions than we do.

Some Christians believe that alcohol is always sinful. And their convictions should be respected. The Bible says this:

Romans 14:15-21(NKJV) Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So what do we do? Do we really need it? Don't drink alcohol if it will offend a brother or sister in Christ.

The Bible forbids drinking if it hinders the gospel.

Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 9 that even though he was allowed to eat and drink anything he wanted, he was very careful not to do things that would hinder the gospel of Christ. He said, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. "I became all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this

for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

If you are witnessing to someone who thinks it's bad for Christians to drink, there's no way you should drink alcohol in front of that person!

Here is my personal take on drinking:

- Do you really believe that one drink will not lead to another?
- Have you ever as a Christian been "tipsy"?
- How would you feel if you saw me, or any other member of our church walking out of a bottle store with booze in our hand?

The rule is: DON'T GET DRUNK AND DON'T DO WILD PARTIES

There are plenty of alternatives to alcohol available. My advice, stay away from it, why risk moving out of God's place of blessing when you don't need to?

CONCLUSION

My challenge today is that we realise that there are rules for Christians and that we start to follow them. Leave the desires of the flesh behind and rather choose to live the victorious life that the Holy Spirit will produce in us.

If you want true freedom, these are things that will replace the desires of the flesh and give you victory: Galatians 5:22-25 (NLT) But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. 25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.

Let us pray for each one who may be having a struggle with the desires of the flesh and ask the Holy Spirit to replace those desires with His fruit.