

Christianity is Not *about* “Rule-Keeping”

When we sit down to play a game that we've never played before, we ask, “So, what are the rules?” People often think of Christianity in the same way. They want to know, “What are the rules?” Are we willing to see how destructive it is to think of Christianity **primarily** in terms of rule-keeping? Seek “rules” for living Christ-like!



About what time of the day did Eutychus go to sleep and fall out a window?

When the New Testament describes our walk with Christ, it has to do with relationship, rather than rule-keeping. Christ is the bride-groom and the church is His bride (Ephesians 5). Christ is the Shepherd and we are His sheep (John 10). Christ is the Master and we are His servants (Luke 17:7-10). Even the metaphor of the body (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12) is about the church's relationship with each other and with Christ, the head. Even though there is a sense in which relationships have “rules,” we don't typically think of relationships in those terms. After all, a couple who **primarily** thought of their marriage in terms of “rule-keeping,” wouldn't have a very healthy marriage, would they? Similarly, it is not healthy to think of our relationship with Christ **primarily** in terms of rule-keeping. Here are some of the possible problems a “rule-keeping” spirit creates:

1. A Rule-Keeping Spirit Promotes Sin. In the same way game players say, “I checked, it's not against the rules,” many people do the same with the Bible. They believe, as long as the Bible doesn't *specifically* say something is a sin, they can do it. What if I marriage was treated that way? Imagine a husband who says, when he comes in at 2:00 AM, “You can't be mad at me, because there's no rule saying I can't come home at 2:00 AM.” That's not the way a faithful marriage works and that's not the way Christianity works. This type of rule-keeping spirit motivates people to “look for loopholes” and “alternative interpretations.” Motivated by a rule-keeping spirit, a person may say: “I checked, there's nothing in the Bible against gay marriage.” Or “I checked, there's nothing in the Bible against going to clubs.” Or even, “I checked, there's nothing in the Bible against pre-marital sex.” This rule-keeping spirit has caused many to fall into sin. Instead, we ought to have an attitude like Paul, “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). Right? Yes!

2. A Rule-Keeping Spirit Encourages People to do the Minimum. They love to know the rules—the minimum they have to do in order to “win.” Rule-keepers love lists and checklists, because once they've done everything on the list, they don't have to do any more. What if I treated a friendship or marriage this way? Imagine saying to a spouse, “Hey, there's no rule saying I have to give you a gift on our anniversary.” How well does that kind of an attitude work in a relationship? In the church, the bride of Christ, many go through the New Testament and come up with several lists. These lists are non-negotiable matters of salvation, worship, church organization, and Christian living. Everything on these lists may be biblical, but they may leave a person feeling like once he has checked everything off the lists, salvation has arrived (see Mark 10:17-31). Have you heard, “Fasting was something they did in the New Testament, but it's not something we have to do today?” Why not? Well, because it's not on our checklist. Do you and I see fasting as a good thing to do, but we don't do it because it didn't make the list of things we “have to do?” Why? How about we stop the checklists and do “good work” we have the opportunity to do (see Galatians 6:10)?

3. A Rule-Keeping Spirit Fosters Competition. Christian Rule-Keepers are—by nature—competitive. We want to know how we're doing in relation to others. But, when a spouse's birthday is forgotten, can I say, “Well, at least I have more points than that other spouse down the street?” No, of course not! Relationships are **not** competitions, and neither is Christianity. Unfortunately, we still struggle *not* to be like the Pharisee, who prayed, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get” (Luke 18:11-12). He was “keeping score!” He thought himself more religious than the tax collector. Listen, God doesn't grade on a curve. You are *not* in competition with your neighbor, your sibling, or others across town. Stop comparing yourself to others. Walk humbly with the Lord (Micah 6:8).

4. A Rule-Keeping Spirit Turns Us into Referees. Christian Rule-Keepers love to play referee. They throw penalty flags and blow whistles when someone breaks a rule. They may even add a few of their own rules to the game, where they believe they are necessary. Imagine meeting a friend at a restaurant, coming in a couple of minutes late and hearing, “Whoa! You're late? That's a violation of the friendship rule. Don't do that again or I will have to take away points.” That's not how you treat a friend. As Christians, we have created all kinds of “rules” based on traditions. There are examples where Christians act like referees, “The rules clearly state that you must do such-and such.” If there is a soul in danger, restore them with a spirit of gentleness (Galatians 6:1), not the spirit of a self-appointed referee.

5. A Rule-Keeping Spirit Creates a Sense of Entitlement. When it comes to rule-keeping, it's all about winning, isn't it? We believe that if we play by the rules, we play better than everyone else, and the judge is fair – then we are entitled to a victory trophy. Right? The New Testament uses several sports metaphors to inspire Christians, to run the race and win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). But this is simply speaking of the discipline and perseverance Christians need in life. It is not to say that going to heaven is a matter of going through all the right motions, checking all the right boxes, following all the rules, and *then* being entitled to eternal life. Among other things, our relationship to God is like that of a slave and a Master. A slave works hard and does everything he's supposed to do because of his relationship to the master. He has not – by doing his job – earned anything (Luke 17:7-10). Everything God gives us we have received because God IS love! We are not “entitled” to anything. How could anyone think, “Of course I'm going to heaven. I kept all the rules?” You and I don't want salvation to be about rule-keeping. If it were on a basis of rule keeping, we would be forever lost. Thankfully, it's a matter of grace given by God. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Stop Being Rule-Keepers, but Don't Stop Being Obedient! Don't think that we need not be obedient. Quite to the contrary, when we stop being “rule-keepers,” we can become *obedient from the heart* (Romans 6:17). This type of heart will cause us to stop asking, “What can I get away with?” and start asking, “What pleases God?” It will cause us to worship and praise God differently, serve differently, and interact with one another differently. Christianity is not about “rule-keeping.”

By Wes McAdams

To our valued visitors: *Please feel free to participate!*

You should expect to hear singing with voices only, a few “family” announcements, prayers spoken, and see the Lord's Supper offered, then free-willed giving, and gospel preaching from the Bible. Any response is up to you and will be kindly received. We are glad you decided to worship God with us on this first day of the week!

Birthday/Anniversary Lunch: Second Sunday...

NMCCH: Spray & Wash and Bar Bath Soap
(pick up in **April 6, 2019**)

Friday Bible Study: 7 to 8 PM, yes, *every* Friday ...
God bless your study of His Word!

Children's Holiday Party: Saturday (12/8)
from 1-3 PM (more INFO on bulletin board)

Congregational Holiday Party: Sunday
(12/16) after PM service (more INFO on
bulletin board)

Building Relationships Seminar: at
Howe, **January 11-13, 2019** (more INFO on
bulletin board)