



"Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting."

—Tim Keller

21-Jul-23

House Rules

Imagine receiving a personal summons from a mysterious benefactor who invites you to leave behind your dull, ordinary, humdrum life and begin a new one: to move into his mansion and begin living the fulfilling life he does. Everybody has heard of this immensely wealthy and powerful man, yet very little is actually known about him. But your current life is going nowhere, so you pack your bags and bid your acquaintances *adieu*.

Upon your arrival at his magnificent mansion, the splendor and beauty of the vast estate strike you with awe. Everywhere you look, there is perfection; the smallest details have all been attended to. The refined benefactor greets you warmly, welcoming you. You stammer about, trying to express both your gratitude and shock. "What could I have possibly done to deserve this?" you finally blurt out.

"Nothing," he replies simply. "You *don't* deserve it. I offer this opportunity to whomever I choose. Personal merit is not involved." As you digest this, he continues, "I am offering you a chance to be one of my heirs—to be adopted, if you will. I want to share with you the quality of life I live and teach you how to live as I do. This life is not one of indulgence—there certainly is

work involved!—but it is a life of liberty, and the fulfillment is far beyond anything a self-centered life can offer."

With that, he hands you a thin, small book. As you start to open it, he explains. "These are the house rules. This is how we maintain order and quality of life within this house. I require all guests to abide by them. They keep things running smoothly."

After being shown to your room, you examine the little book. Most of the rules make sense, but some seem just a little repressive and suffocating. For a split-second, you consider packing up and returning to your old life, but you push that thought away—at least for now. You read some more. Some are quite reasonable. Others make you think, *How can I ever be myself with all these rules? Liberty, indeed!*

Later that day, you meet another guest in the mansion. Having lived there for several years, he seems to have a good handle on things. You ask him about the house rules: "How can one live with such restrictions on everything? Why can we not just be free to do as we please?"

"It's quite simple," he replies. "You're looking at this the wrong way. You're thinking of 'liberty' as a type of independence—the freedom to do whatever you want. That idea is pretty common with newcomers. But true liberty is different: It is the freedom that comes from peaceful co-existence. Freedom from pain, fear, blame, competition, envy, strife, sickness—basically, freedom from wrecking your life—or someone else's."

"So what happens if I don't follow them? Do I get fined or something?"

He chuckles. "It's not like that at all. We all fall short at times. But remember, we're here to learn how to live a better life. If that isn't what you want, you can go back to the misery of your old life. But you will never have another opportunity like this. None of us were invited here because we already lived by these standards. But those that have been invited and choose not to cooperate don't last long. They're not interested in a better way of living—just their own way. I know the house rules are difficult to swallow at first. They probably seem quaint, even eccentric—but they work."

Settling into your new environment, you begin to experience life to a depth you never thought possible. You become acquainted with the other houseguests and come to know the distinguished—yet approachable—owner who has taken you under his wing. The days turn into weeks, the months into years. Personal dramas and difficulties mar the household's [peace](#) now and then, and with each incident, it becomes apparent how those involved could have avoided it: by paying a little closer attention to the house rules. In fact, the longer you live there, your respect and appreciation grow for the little book that defines how to live peacefully. You understand that at its heart is a basic formula for living: giving rather than getting.

You realize that the house rules are not the purpose of life in the mansion. They are simply the way your adopted "father" lives as he goes about his work. He does not ask his heirs to do anything he is unwilling to do. When the rest of the house follows his example, there is harmony and beauty because everyone understands what is expected and what works.

You reflect on your old life and are amazed that anyone could live that way. You remember some previous discussions about morality and the general consensus that things like murder and [adultery](#) were wrong. However, nobody wanted to go much further for fear of being legalistic. Yet, after living this new way and seeing the results, you shake your head in wonder at the misunderstanding: *Sticking to timeless standards is not legalism. It is the only sane way to live.*

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Satan's Lies About the Law](#)

by Charles Whitaker (1944-2021)

Charles Darwin wrote in a letter to Asa Gray (a friend of Darwin's and a proponent of theistic evolution) that he could find no credible evidence for beneficence and intelligent design in evolutionary processes, a process brutally cruel and evil- characterized by Tennyson as nature "red in tooth and

claw." Darwin argues for a "designed law" having come together by chance. Nature's laws do not operate on "chance"; Einstein argues that God does not throw dice. Randomness occurs in neither physical nor spiritual laws. The universal consequence for all sin is inevitable death. Webster defines law as an observed regularity of nature, characterized as inevitable, absolute, and certain, totally incompatible with chance. Keeping God's Law is our assurance that the relationship we have with God is genuine. The second lie Satan has foisted upon the "Christian" world is that God's Law (including that 'burdensome' Sabbath) does not pertain to anyone outside of Israel. If the consequences of sin are universal, then God's Law is universal. God's law illumines what sin is, converting ignorant bliss into the horrifying insight that we have all sinned and have earned the death penalty. In effect, God's Law enables sin to kill us; the power of sin is the law. All of the entire creation is under sin longing and yearning for the power of God's deliverance and grace.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Dead to the Law?](#)

by Earl L. Henn

Romans 7, verse 4, says that we are 'dead to the law through the body of Christ.' What does this mean? Earl Henn explains the meaning in its context, showing that it refers to the 'old man' which perished at our baptism.

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