



"Important principles may and must be inflexible."
—Abraham Lincoln

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House Rules

Imagine that you receive a personal summons from a mysterious benefactor. He 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 that he does. Everybody has heard of this immensely wealthy and powerful man, yet very little is actually known of him. But your current life is going nowhere, so you pack your bags and bid your acquaintances *adieu*.

When you arrive at his magnificent mansion, you are struck by the splendor and beauty of the vast estate. Everywhere you look there is perfection; the smallest details have all been attended to. The refined benefactor greets you warmly and welcomes you in. You stammer about, trying to express both your gratitude and shock. "What could I have possibly done to deserve this?" you finally get out. "Nothing," he replies simply. "You *don't* deserve it. I offer this 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 is not a life of indulgence—there certainly is work involved!—but it is one of liberty, and the fulfillment is 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 the order and quality within this house—a of the guests here are asked to abide by these. They keep things running smoothly."

After being shown to your room, you sit down and examine the little book. Most of the rules make sense, but some of them seem just a little repressive and suffocating. For a split-second you consider packing back up and heading back to your old life, but you

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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 of these rules? Liberty, indeed!*

Later that day you meet another guest in the mansion. He has been living there for a number of years and seems to have a pretty 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's pretty common with the newcomers. But true liberty is different; it is the freedom that comes from a peaceful co-existence. Freedom from pain, from 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?"

"It's not like that at all," he answers. "We all fall short at times. But remember, you'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're never going to have another opportunity like this. None of us were invited here because we were already living 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."

You begin settling into your new environment, and start to experience life to a depth you never thought possible. You become acquainted with the other houseguests, and are able to really get to know the distinguished—yet approachable—owner who has taken you under his wing. The days turn into weeks, the months into years. There are occasional dramas and sporadic difficulties in the household, and with each incident you can see how it could have been avoided—by paying a little closer attention to the house rules. In fact, the longer you live there, the more respect and appreciation you have for the little book that defines the way to live peacefully. You understand that at its heart is a very basic formula for living: giving rather than getting.

You realize that the 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 any of his heirs to do something 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.

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You think back to your old life and are amazed that anyone could live that way. You remember some previous discussions about morality and that there was a general consensus that things like [murder](#) and [adultery](#) were wrong. However, nobody wanted to go much farther than that 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

[Keeping God's Standards](#)

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

John Reid explores the origins of standardizing weights and measures. Following the model of the European Trade fairs, the British perfected the first set of standards because of business necessity or the desire to make profit. Without accurate standards of weight and measurement, chaos and anarchy would result. God's Commandments will be the spiritual weights and measures in the world tomorrow, but until then, we as a tiny insignificant remnant have been called out to reform and purify our lives, glorifying God by keeping these standards as a bright light, growing in grace and knowledge to the full stature of Christ, keeping them in trust as a special people, practicing what we are to become.

From the Archives: Featured Article

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by Earl L. Henn (1934-1997)

Many use Colossians 2:14 to 'prove' God's law is done away. Is this really what Paul means? Earl Henn uses the Bible to explain the apostle's intent in this verse.

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