

There's Joy in Following the Rules

PE was one of those high school requirements that I tolerated and often dreaded. I'm not sure why it was called PE because physical education had nothing to do with education. Sure, it kept me physically moving (to avoid those red balls in dodgeball), but where was the education? I have yet to sit in a meeting where my manager said, "First item on the agenda is to run the bleachers. First one through gets first crack at the doughnuts."



Periodically, the coach running the PE class would have us play a game he called "Military Basketball." It was different from regular basketball in that it only had one rule: No biting. (I'm not making this up.) It had no other rules. It didn't matter how you got the ball in the hoop so long as you got it in the hoop. Oh, and you didn't bite someone.

On those afternoons, there would be 15 adolescent boys tackling 15 other adolescent boys on a hard gym floor. If one of the smaller guys had the ball, they might just pick him up with the ball and run down the court.

In that moment, my 14-year-old not-fully-functioning brain made a discovery: there are benefits to rules. Rules make the game fun and, more importantly, they make the game safe. Ever played a game with someone who cheats or keeping changing the rules? It's frustrating. It's no fun. But when we all play by the same rules, everyone enjoys the game.

We're immersed in a culture where people want to live by their own rules—or ignore rules all together. That's sad because they don't realize that the rules—the commands—God has given in His Word are for our benefit. Yes, they keep us from harm, but I've discovered that, when I follow His rules, life is more enjoyable.

Not only is a disregard for the correct rules sad, but it is also tragic. God's commands are for our benefit. They keep us safe—and they keep society safe as we interact with one another. Look at how violent we have become as a society: vindictive verbal abuse against those who don't agree with our rules ... road rage against those who ignore or make up their own rules for driving ... violence against those whose rules or views of justice differ from our own.

The church is not immune. Even though evangelicals give a nod to the importance of Scripture, too many tend to focus on certain commands while bypassing others. In other words, they keep some rules, but only the ones they want to keep (or find easy to keep).

- We carry the banner of "love one another" even as we show subtle signs of racism.
- We rail against the sin of homosexuality while ignoring the sin of gluttony.
- We publicly support evangelism and missions but do nothing personally to live a consistent life that points to Christ.

We miss out on the abundant life Christ desires for us when we fail to live by the whole counsel of Scripture. I should point out that the Christian life is a lifelong journey of bringing our lives into full conformity to His Word; in other words, none of us has reached a sinless state wherein we are living in perfect conformity to the whole counsel of Scripture. So, while we're still on the journey, my concern is our disregard for the things we are keenly aware of in Scripture. As James said, "So it is sin to know the good and yet not do it" (Jas. 4:17).

If you want to know joy and abundance, live in obedience to what you discover in God's Word. His rules are immersed in His love for us, and when you choose His rules over your own rules, you become more keenly aware of just how much He loves you. And that's a wonderful place to be.

"But whoever keeps his word, truly in him the love of God is made complete" (1 John 2:5).