

Rules

Have you ever tried to explain football to someone? There are a lot of rules in football and they seem to be ever-changing. I had the opportunity to do a “classroom at a game” where I was able to explain some of the rules, especially the concept of first down, what second, third and fourth down mean, and why you would have to punt, to a group of football moms and cheerleaders. One of the mothers had told me, “I only know when I get to have a hot dog.” That was her version of “halftime.” Board games, card games (I still cannot master Canasta), and others all have rules. What’s up with all the rules all over the place?

Did you or do you now have rules in your own home? If you live alone, the only one to enforce the rule on you is you. But, if you share your living space, chances are there are rules that you have to follow in order to make sure that everyone has what they need when they need it. Or, the rules are in place to ensure that the kingdom of the house remains peaceable. In many cases, this involves agreeing to do certain jobs or tasks in order to make the household run smoothly. Even after

you were free from your parents, you realized that this freedom meant following some rules.

The people in the time of Moses suddenly had freedom. They were free from Egyptian rule, free from being slaves, free from having to build pyramids and anything else that the Egyptians had in mind for them. They could go about the business of setting up how they were going to live, even while they were in the desert. Not only did they need direction on how to worship, who to worship, and when to worship. They needed direction on how to live the rest of their lives.

Let's break the Ten Commandments down, shall we? The first three commandments teach them how to deal with God. The concept of one God over may have started to be foreign to them again as they had lived with the Egyptians who had many gods. The command to remind them of who God is and there shall be no strange or false gods had to be told to them. They had to be told to honor God's name and when to come together for worship. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. They had no perception of what to do with a day off to concentrate on their relationship with God.

We use these three commandments as the basis of our own relationship with God. We have to be reminded not to worship our possessions or money, even when Powerball gets up to \$1.4 billion. Think about our own language (heck, I can make a truck driver blush) and how we use God's name. This commandment helps to keep us in check. "Remember to keep holy the Sabbath." Look what we've done with this one. We cannot even get families to come to church because they have to compete with sports and other activities that now take place when they never would. There was something comforting about having the day to make sure we got to church, visit family, eat dinner as a family, and take care of simple things around the house. The most important thing was to make time to worship God. It also allowed for youth groups and other types of religious activities to take place. Maybe we need to pay more attention to how we follow the first three Commandments today.

The fourth commandment, "Honor your father and mother," was necessary because of the way they treated their parents. It wasn't that they were necessarily mean to them by the standards of the time, but

they were left on their own and not always cared for in their old age or infirmed capacities. You'd think they would have just done this. If you look today, there are some people who need to be reminded of this commandment as well.

The rest of the commandments are about life and how to get along with your neighbors. You shall not commit murder. Protect yourself, family, and property, but not randomly murder people. You shall not commit adultery. This one was trickier than it is today because the idea of a monogamous marriage was not the custom. Men still had more than one wife. As a matter of fact, it doesn't even monogamy isn't a norm until around the time of Jesus. You shall not steal. It meant the same as it does today. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Don't tell lies about your neighbor to have them arrested or to slander their name. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods. What belongs to your neighbor belongs to your neighbor. Don't show envy and think bad thoughts about your neighbor because of what they have.

It is because of what the people in the time of Jesus knew that he didn't have to go through the list of commandments. He gave them new commandments that told them how to love God, love themselves, and love their neighbors. It was because of this understanding that early followers of Christ were ready for the next step, which is the basis for all of Jesus' teachings.

As Christians, of course, we want to follow Jesus. We want to help to spread his word. This means that we also want to follow his rules. This is a bit difficult for us as adults. We waited our first eighteen to twenty-one years to NOT follow the rules of our parents, to be independent, to live "without rules" only to enter into a society that has rules for all kinds of things. Thank God we do! Then we choose to follow Jesus and, in turn, accept all of his "rules" to be good followers.

As we accept these rules, we have to figure out how to live in them so that we can pay attention to the spirit of the law or rule and not get tied up or bound by what is written word for word. But if we have these laws, rules, and commandments with us, we are certainly well on our

way to doing the right thing as we work to spread the Gospel message
here in the southern Pioneer Valley. Amen