

## RULES AND REGULATIONS

1 Timothy 1:5-17

“Tesla” is not only the name of a company that makes electric cars. The company was named after the man who developed AC electricity which powers our homes. But it is also the name of a Canadian rock group whose most famous song is called “Signs.” Here are the lyrics to that song:

*And the sign says "Long-haired freaky people need not apply"  
So I put my hair under my hat and I went in to ask him why  
He said, "You look like a fine outstanding young man, I think you do"  
So I took off my hat, I said, "Imagine that, huh, me working for you", oh*

*Signs, signs, everywhere there's signs  
Messing up the scenery, breaking my mind  
Do this, don't do that  
Can't you read the sign?*

*And the sign says "Anybody caught trespassing will be shot on sight"  
So I jumped the fence and I yelled at the house  
"Hey! What gives you the right  
To put up a fence and keep me out  
Or to keep Mother Nature in?  
If God was here, He'd tell it to your face  
Man, you're some kind of sinner"*

*Oh, I say now, "Mister, can't you read?"  
You got to have a shirt and tie to get a seat  
You can't watch, no, you can't eat  
You ain't supposed to be here  
And the sign says, "You got to have a membership card to get inside"  
Huh!*

*And the sign says "Everybody, welcome, come in, kneel down and pray"  
But then they passed around a plate at the end of it all  
And I didn't have a penny to pay  
So I got me a pen and a paper  
And I made up my own sign  
I said, "Thank you, Lord, for thinking about me  
I'm alive and doing fine", oh*

The song expresses the desire that young people can have for freedom from rules and regulations. Isn't that one of the reasons to go off to college, so you can get away from being always told what to do and how to do it?

St. Paul seems to agree with that sentiment in Timothy:

For the Law not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

Think of how Jesus defied the rules and regulations of His time. He let unclean people touch Him. He shared meals with people who had a bad reputation. He healed people on the Sabbath. So why not get rid of the rules and regulations, except for the really bad?

Think of our world without rules and regulations. Try playing a game of basketball where there are no rules. You could be hacked and fouled all over the place and nothing would be done about it even if you are playing against Iowa State. Tesla could sing its song about "Signs" and not receive any money for it because there are no copyright laws. A college degree would be totally useless because there would be no grade to know if you really passed the classes. We could eat unlimited amounts of tainted food, take unsafe drugs, and drive in dangerous cars without anyone getting into trouble.

No, we need rules and regulations because we live in a sinful world. The problem is that we want rules and regulations to favor "me." If the law means that my team gets the interference call to set up a touchdown, if someone else's insurance pays for my car to be repaired, if my property is properly protected, or if doctors aren't giving me unsafe drugs, then I like those laws. But if those same laws help the opposing team, force my car insurance to go up, force me to pay higher taxes for my property, or keep me from receiving a medicine that may help me, then I don't want them.

A classic example is rules and regulations about abortion. Most people say abortion is wrong. There are plenty of people who want to adopt children. But they aren't so sure about laws against it because they may need abortion as a "back up" plan.

It was the case in Jesus' day. A whole group of people called the "Pharisees" (Paul had been one of them) made themselves powerful and popular by observing all kinds of laws they felt were based on their religion. As people of wealth and influence, they could obey these laws in ways common people could not. For instance, they could hire people to do the "dirty work" that would make them unclean. On the other hand, Paul shared the Gospel with people in the pagan world who did not want the rules and regulations God gave in the Old Testament, like not having sexual relations outside of marriage, telling the truth, and not swindling other people.

When the Gospel is shared to people in Eastern cultures, they think of “sinners” as being those who break the laws—criminals. Since they haven’t been convicted of any crimes, they do not see themselves as sinners who have broken God’s laws.

What we have to see is that when Paul said “the law is not for the righteous,” the “righteous” did not mean most people. This is Paul writing to Timothy. Paul proclaimed that all have sinned and fall short of God, that we are justified by God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus. The “righteous” are Christians who do not need the law because they have been forgiven by the blood of Jesus. Paul is exactly right—the law was laid down because of sin. Because we sin, we need rules and regulations to hold sin in check. But even more we need it to help point us to Jesus.

Then as forgiven people we are led not by law or to subvert the law. Those things we would do to turn things to our advantage and pretend that we are in charge of our own destiny. Instead, we live “in the law,” as people who want to do what God says is best for us and others.

Paul puts it this way in his words to Timothy:

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life.

Paul, who persecuted Christians, was forgiven by Jesus. That is why he called himself the foremost of sinners. The rules and regulations show us that we too are sinners. Sinners are those for whom Jesus died. So, our words and actions aren’t done to follow the rules and be saved, but as forgiven people whom God uses to show His love to others as we follow His commands. That is what it means to be “righteous.”

Rules and regulations—as a sinner we need them. But even more we need what only God can give in Jesus—the forgiveness of our sins. Then we can join with Paul in saying, “To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”