

DAY ONE

GOOD RULES

Write down three words that describe what the world thinks about Christianity and all of its “rules.”

Are these words usually positive or negative? Why do you think this is the case?

What are some biblical commands you sometimes find difficult to follow or understand?

Let's see what the Bible says about God's rules.

READ DEUTERONOMY 10:12-13.

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?”

List the three things Israel was commanded to do to show appropriate fear (honor or respect) to God:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Why should we follow God's commands?

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 explain that God's commands are for our own good. Has anyone ever told you that before? As tough as it is to believe sometimes, rules do exist for our own good. Think about your favorite sport. What would it be like if there were no rules, if the players just ran around the field or court doing whatever they wanted—with no boundaries or no fouls? The game wouldn't be a game anymore—it would be chaos. The rules of a game make the sport what it is; rules are what make a game actually playable.

Now let's take this one step further. Think about society.

What would it be like if society had no government or laws?

Would you feel more or less safe in a society without rules?

With no laws, people could steal or hurt others without consequences. People would literally get away with murder. As harsh as they may sometimes seem, rules ultimately exist to protect us.

The same goes for God's laws. He knows what will help society and individuals thrive. For example, let's look at three of the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20):

- Do not lie.
- Do not steal.
- Do not murder.

Imagine what society would be like if everyone followed just those three rules.

Isn't it possible that God knows what is best for us concerning every other command He has given us, especially when it comes to love and sex?

Has this devotion changed the way you see God's commandments? If so, how?

What is one step you can take to show God you trust that He knows best?

DAY TWO

THE REAL MESSAGE

List some ideas about love and sex that are prevalent in our society today.

Society is filled with messages about love and sex that are contrary to what Christianity teaches. *Is sexual activity really that big of a deal? Does porn really hurt anyone? As long as sex is consensual, there's nothing wrong with it, right? Are you really going to judge someone else for who they love? Why embrace a view of sex, love, and gender that seems so closed-minded? Isn't the Christian sexual ethic unrealistic today anyway?*

Be honest. Do you agree with any of these ideas? If so, why?

These messages contain many of the themes being championed in our society today: tolerance, equality, diversity, and inclusion. Generally, these are all good things. As Christians, we believe all human beings have equal and intrinsic worth and that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their beliefs or lifestyle. But this does not mean we have to affirm everyone's choices and actions.

Let's look at one of the most common messages in our culture and see what the Bible says about it.

Are you really going to judge someone else for how they love?

The world has adopted the notion that it is wrong to judge people for any of their life choices, especially when it comes to sexual behavior. Many are quick to point out that even Jesus says "Judge not" (Matt. 7:1). But there's more to the story.

READ MATTHEW 7:1-5.

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

What are the specific reasons Jesus says not to judge?

Before we can "remove the speck" from others' eyes, what must we do?

Far too many people read the first three words of this passage and stop, thinking it teaches us to never judge anyone. But as we can see, this is not the point at all. This passage teaches us how to judge *the right way*. These words affirm that people do have specks (sins) in their eyes, and it is evident that these specks need to be removed. But if we are struggling with those same sins, we can't go around "fixing" others until we have addressed them in our own lives. *That* is the point of the passage.

Jesus offers another clarification on proper judgment in John 7:24.

"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

What are some examples of judging only by outward appearances?

What do you think the phrase "right judgment" means?

God's Word is our final standard for right and wrong—not our friends, not celebrities, and not culture. The Bible definitely has things to say about love and sex. While Christians should never be harsh and unloving toward others, we should never compromise biblical truth just because the world considers God's sexual ethic narrow-minded and intolerant.

The truth is this: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psa. 19:7).

DAY THREE

WORTH IT

I won't lie: following Jesus's ethic for love and sex isn't always easy. Many times it will clash with the culture around us. You've probably heard reports of Christian bakers, florists, and photographers who have been sued or put out of business for refusing to provide service for same-sex weddings. Maybe you'll never be in a position like theirs. But you may still be shamed and ostracized for choosing Jesus's sexual ethic over the culture's. This can be very discouraging, so we need to remind ourselves of God's promises for our lives. In the end, following Christ will be worth it.

READ ROMANS 8:28-29.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

What is the promise in these verses for those who love God?

What does it mean to be “conformed to the image of his Son”?

We get to become like Jesus. That is the goal of every Christian. But we don't accomplish this on our own—we have God's help along the way.

This passage doesn't begin by saying some things work together for good or just the minor things in our lives. No, *all* things work together for good. This means no matter what we go through—good or bad—every bit of it will work out for good in the end if we follow God and His purpose.

Paul didn't just write these words—he lived them. He had been beaten, shipwrecked, and imprisoned, and he faced constant dangers and difficulties throughout his life (see 2 Cor. 11). Yet he also said this:

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

According to Paul, what is our motivation for not giving up?

What do these kinds of experiences do for us?

What must we keep in mind whenever we face difficult situations?

We can't always see what God is up to when we struggle. Still, we have to trust who we know Him to be. He is good, and all things work together for our good and His glory. He promises that you absolutely will face difficult circumstances, but He also promises that you will never face them alone. Our God is always with us, even in the trials.

He is a God we can trust—no matter what.