

BREAKING ALL THE RULES

2 Kings 5: 1-19a
Mark 1: 40-45

There can be two problems with rules. One is that we could pay too little attention to them, and teeter toward chaos. Two is that we could pay too much attention to the rules and not see that sometimes they hinder.

Rules are important. Rules are vital; they preserve life. Can you imagine what it would be like to drive to Richmond from Petersburg on I-95 that had no traffic laws? There would be no speed limit. You could choose which lane on which to drive, either the northbound lanes or the southbound lanes, because no particular lane would be designated for a specific direction. All other roads would have no law about what side to drive on. You could ignore the traffic lights, because they are changeable right of way rules. In fact, having no rules would make traffic lights obsolete. You could park wherever you wanted, even in the middle of the street.

We could be free from all laws, after all aren't laws really meant to be just a way for lawyers to earn money? No longer would you have to worry about affording anything; you could just take it, since there would be no law against stealing.

Imagine having no laws about murder. If someone offended you it could go ahead and murder him and get it over with. It would not be illegal; there would be no laws.

Imagining what it would be like without laws, one begins to appreciate the reason and need for rules and laws. It would be a horrible world in which to live, if there were no laws, no regulations, and no rules.

On the other hand, sometimes rules and laws get in the way.

Jesus may not have broken all the rules, but he broke quite a few. He usually broke the laws having to do with ritual, but he strengthened the moral laws. He declared certain unclean foods as clean. He declared the sacrificial rituals of the Temple as no longer necessary, because they were an anticipation of Him and His sacrifice and redemption. Jesus was especially harsh on the rules that had to do with being ritually clean or unclean. There are many examples in the Gospels in which Jesus broke these rules. He allowed the disciples to eat without washing hands. He allowed them to reap the grain to eat, which was illegal to do on the Sabbath. He healed on the Sabbath, at a time when the art of healing was considered work, therefore unlawful to do on the Sabbath. Jesus allowed a ritually unclean woman (bleeding for 12 years) to touch him which technically would have made him unclean. Whenever he touched someone (Jairus' daughter, etc.) who had died he would have been declared unclean. Jesus broke a lot of ritual laws that had become as important as the moral laws, such as the Ten Commandments.

That's exactly what Jesus did with the man who suffered from leprosy. The leper came to Jesus and expressed his

faith, “If you will, you can make me clean.” The leper had no doubt that Jesus was capable of the healing. He just did not know if Jesus was willing to heal him. Was Jesus willing, again, to risk ritual uncleanness, by touching the leper in order to heal him? Jesus was really changing things around, and for those witnessing this - it looked as if He were breaking all the rules.

But what Jesus was really doing was redeeming. The old pattern, based upon the old covenant with the cultic sacrifices was to prevent the spread of sin, understood as being unclean. According to this pattern if something clean came into contact with something unclean, then it rendered the clean object or person as unclean. Therefore, if someone touched a corpse, then he was unclean.

Jesus, as Messiah, introduced a new pattern. It was a complete reversal of the old pattern. Rather than the clean being rendered as unclean by contact of an unclean object/person, Jesus would reach out to the unclean and by his touch would render it clean. Therefore the woman who bled for 12 years did not make Jesus unclean, Jesus made her clean. The leper did not make Jesus unclean by Jesus touching him, but the other way around. Jesus touched the leper, healed him, and made him clean.

The biggest rule that Jesus broke was the one that redeems us. He conquered death. Instead of death having the last word, Jesus broke the rule by rising from the dead and living forever. Now we have a hope that is totally amazing. It is a hope in the resurrection and everlasting life that was brought

forth once more by our Savior who was willing to say, “I will, be healed.” We are so used to death being the one who has the last word, and it still looks like that from a purely human point of view. But from our faith point of view the rule is reversed. Life, resurrected life, conquers death and ultimately has the final word.

What does God call us to do? He calls us to believe that this is really true. He calls us to live the truth that resurrected life is the final answer, not our corporal death. It is a healing balm that we all need.

He calls us to act like the redemption of God is for all sinners. Are we a church that fears sinners, afraid that they might ruin us? Or are we a church that welcomes sinners and trusts that God in Christ will touch and heal them?

It gives us hope that our sinfulness will be totally conquered. We don't have to worry about evil overcoming God. We can trust that God overcomes evil. This includes our individual lives; our congregational life, even life itself. Someday all creation shall be redeemed where there is no more pain and ever tear will be wiped away. What wonderful ways to break all the old, sinful, deadly rules from which we now suffer. Amen.

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