



## Matthew 22.34-40

THE RULES. You know, the BIG ones. Don't lie. Don't cheat, or at least don't get caught. Don't steal. If it feels good, don't. And most important, don't do anything that gets God mad. OK. So those aren't the real rules, but they are a pretty good summary of how many of us interpret them. The rules—another name for Old Testament Law—are nothing more than restrictive and harsh commands, necessary evils to be endured and obeyed, at least when convenient, so that we can “be right” and “stay right” with God. Isn't that the point of the rules? Didn't God give them so that we would know where the lines are so that we wouldn't tick Him off? Polling the average person, we would find that, yes, this is how most people understand the rules. Here's the problem, two actually. First, this isn't how Jesus understood the rules. Second, viewing the rules in this way says a lot about how we understand God and live our lives. Let's address the second one first.

How we keep the rules, those various laws and commands found throughout Scripture, says a great deal about who we are and who God is to us. If keeping the rules is about making sure we stay on God's good side, then we are people who live life seeking to earn God's favor, and frankly this God is a mean and petty God who demands a silly sacrifice. (Think of the Knights who say “Ni,” only bigger. OK, so I am a huge Monty Python fan.) Here's the point. Life lived like this is a life in which we are always looking over our shoulder wondering if we have somehow done something that is going to result in God's punishment. Or, we go through life debating which rules we can keep and which ones we can ignore and still be good enough for God. So, just how good is good enough? I suppose it depends on who you ask.

Jesus didn't see the rules this way. For Jesus, the rules weren't necessary evils given by a petty God to keep Him from smacking us around. For Jesus, there weren't big ones and little ones, ones you had to keep and ones that God would give you a pass on, though that is the context of the question in Matthew 22.34-40. No, for Jesus, the rules were about life. The rules were God's attempt to point a free, self-determined people who were bent away from Him (Gen. 3) back to the life He had always intended for them. The rules were meant to point people back to a life of love, a life fully given and connected to God and others. The rules weren't meant to hold one down. The rules were meant to lift one up, back to where they belonged. Keeping the rules wasn't about earning anything. Keeping the rules was about recognizing that we need guidance, guidance on how to live the best life, and that this guidance could only come from God. That we have come to see the rules as anything other than this, demonstrates just how much we truly are bent away from God, how much we need Him. If we could see the rules as Jesus saw them. If we could keep them as he kept them. What could be? Is that even possible? We'll just have to keep following along with *The Story* and find out.

A fellow traveler,

Blake

### **My Next Step**

We encourage you to consider doing the following as a way of handing off faith to your family. . .

- **Family scripture memory:** Out of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12.34). What lies within us, deep within us, guides how we relate to God and to others. Only when our inner-most parts are rightly oriented can we truly love God and others completely (Matthew 22.34-40). One way you can shape the hearts of your family is through the memorizing of Scripture. This can actually be a fun and creative experience for your family, one that yields great fruit. Consider picking a verse of Scripture each week that is age appropriate in content and length. Print it on a sheet of paper that can be posted in a conspicuous place such as the refrigerator or a wall in the dining room. Each night at dinner, see who can say their verse. You might be surprised how children pick this up more quickly than their parents. As you memorize these verses, talk about their meaning and seek to live them out. Over time, you will see the hearts of your family turn to God and grow to be more loving to others.

We encourage you to take one of the following next steps on your faith journey. . .

- **Thinking new thoughts:** Jesus instructed his audience that God desired that we give ourselves completely to Him and to others in love. However, this is easier said than done. To truly love, we cannot begin with our outward actions, we have to begin with the attitude of our hearts. One way we do this is by addressing what we think and replacing it with new thoughts. One of the easiest ways to do this is by memorizing Scripture. This week, memorize Matthew 22.34-40. Meditate upon it when you wake up. Meditate on it while you are driving. Meditate on it before you lie down at night. For the next 30 days, see how many times a day you can call this passage to mind. Along the way, see if God does not begin to change how you think, and as you think differently, see if He does not begin to change the way you act.