

6 Rules Every Man Must Break





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[BILL PERKINS]



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*To you,
dear child,
who awakens
with
empty hands
empty arms
empty hopes
and
an empty heart.
God hears your cry
gathers your tears
and sends his love.*





CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>Introduction: A Dog Named El Niño</i>	xiii
CHAPTER ONE: The Rule of Passivity	1
<i>Never Get in a Fight</i>	
CHAPTER TWO: The Rule of Playing It Safe	21
<i>Never Risk It All</i>	
CHAPTER THREE: The Rule of Perseverance	43
<i>Never Give Up</i>	
CHAPTER FOUR: The Rule of Independence	65
<i>Never Ask for Help</i>	
CHAPTER FIVE: The Rule of Restraint	83
<i>Never Lose Your Cool</i>	
CHAPTER SIX: The Rule of Impressing Others	101
<i>Never Look Stupid</i>	
<i>Afterthoughts</i>	123
<i>Check Out These Books</i>	129
<i>Join the Movement</i>	131
<i>Endnotes</i>	133

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Ben Smith . . . Hey, doc. Did we have fun as kids, or what? Thanks for our story and letting me tell it.

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Gary Witherall . . . I wish I had taken the leap with you. How about if we jump off that bridge together?

Mr. Neeners . . . You dog, you.

INTRODUCTION

A DOG NAMED EL NIÑO

After my friend Rod Cooper read an early draft of the first few chapters of this book I asked, “What do you think?”

“I think you’ve got an issue with rules,” he said.

Of course, he was right. I’ve always had an issue with rules . . . especially rules that serve no legitimate purpose. I’ve got an even bigger problem with people who make it their job to enforce those rules.

One day I stood in line at a government building waiting for a lady behind a window to stamp a piece of paper. I don’t remember any of the specifics like the time of year or what purpose the paper served. I clearly recall waiting with ten or so other men and women for the moment when I would be first in line and get my paper stamped.

Suddenly, the lady with the power to stamp or not to stamp stomped out of her office and into the hall. She wore her gray hair in a bun pulled tight behind her large meaty head. She stood with her hands on her sizable hips. Sweat beaded her forehead, and her gray dress fit as smartly as the uniform worn by a soldier in a parade.

Pointing at us with the metal stamping device that she held in her right hand, she said, “You must form a straight line if you want me to stamp your paper.”

In that moment I squinted to see the stripes on the shoulders of her dress. I didn’t see them but felt an urge to stand at

attention and snap a quick salute. I restrained myself because I sensed she might not see the humor in my act. And she might not stamp my paper. Instead I got in line directly behind the man in front of me. I must confess something that still bothers me many years later—perhaps “amuses me” would better describe my feelings. When she wasn’t looking, I quickly stepped out of the line and incited others to join in my rebellion. We managed to get back into a perfect line before she glanced our way. We giggled conspiratorially each time she looked up and saw us standing at attention in a line as straight as a heavily starched pair of pants.

ADD-ON RULES

That event occurred so long ago it’s no more of a memory than a faded picture. More recently I rested in a comfortable chair at the Admirals Club at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. (Because I travel so much, it makes sense for me to pay an annual fee so I have a place to rest, shower, and check my e-mail during flight layovers.) As you’ll discover in this book, I’m notorious for losing things, so I didn’t panic when I failed to see my carry-on bag at my side. Instead, I retraced the steps I had taken since I entered the Admirals Club. When the bag still eluded my eye, I approached the agent at the front desk and asked if anyone had turned in a carry-on bag with my name on it. She said nobody had, and then she searched for it. I mean this woman spent fifteen minutes looking for my bag like a drug-sniffing dog at a crack house.

Hoping someone had turned it in at the admitting desk, I took the elevator down and asked that agent if she had seen it.

She said, "Someone from the food concourse called and said they had your bag."

Filled with optimism I walked to the food concourse and found the teenage girl who had cleared my table. When I asked about my bag she pointed to the manager, a short and talkative man, who had locked my carry-on in a closet. As he handed me the bag, he said, "I took it to the admitting desk and suggested the agent page you, but she refused."

Curious about this, I returned to the club and asked the agent why she hadn't kept my bag and paged me. She said, "Because there are one hundred other men with your name in the club."

While I hadn't counted, I suspected no more than one hundred men, women, and children were in the club as we spoke. And unless there was a national meeting for people with the same name, I'm sure there were not one hundred men named Bill Perkins in the club. But since I've always found the agents and service team at the Admirals Club to be gracious and helpful, I decided not to jerk her chain too hard. But I did have two questions for her: "How many of the hundred men named Bill Perkins do you think are missing their carry-on?"

Before she could respond, I asked, "Is this an Admirals Club rule or is this just a rule you've created yourself?"

When I returned home, I called the head of customer service for the Admirals Club and asked her that same question. Would you like to guess the answer? The Admirals Club has no such rule. It was an add-on rule formulated and enforced by one agent.

I've got to admit that in the larger scheme of things, it was no big deal. I could have lost my bag and never retrieved it. So

what? Or I could have flown to a distant destination without my clothes and toiletries. Such a loss would have been nothing more than a short-term expense and inconvenience.

But some of the extrabiblical rules—read “add-on rules”—written and enforced by religious leaders and groups can cost you much more. They can cost you the vitality of a growing and dynamic friendship with God. Why? Because they flow from a religious culture that insists you must keep add-on rules in order to grow spiritually. Such rules will pull you down and away from God like lead shoes on a swimmer. And that’s why I wrote this book. I think it’s time men recognize the difference between legitimate, God-given rules and illegitimate, man-made ones.

We must draw a distinction between the moral law of God that Jesus reinforced and the add-on rules that he resisted. Rules which the apostle Peter condemned when the sect of the Pharisees demanded that Gentile believers be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. Peter asked the same question we must ask: “Why are you now trying to out-god God, loading these new believers down with rules that crushed our ancestors and crushed us, too?” (Acts 15:10, *The Message*). Today, as then, God’s grace has liberated us from trying to win his favor by keeping a set of rules.

I believe we must follow the example of Jesus and Peter and fight for the grace of God. We must dialogue with and resist those who create and enforce religious add-on rules. And we must be willing to break them.

THE JOY OF FREEDOM

Okay, you may wonder where I dreamed up the six rules every man must break. Actually, I used a very pseudoscientific pro-

cess. I submitted thirteen rules to a group of men from a variety of backgrounds and asked them to identify the six most important ones. From their responses, as well as my own instincts, I selected the six rules found in the book.

In case you think I'm going to give you six rules to replace those you should break . . . I'm not. This book isn't about a new set of rules but about the cultivation of a friendship with Jesus Christ. He alone changes us, not a set of rules.

And yes, I can honestly say I have achieved the lofty standard set by this book about as well as I walk on water and refrain from profanity when I smash my thumb with a hammer. Choosing a friendship with God rather than a life of rules and regulations is a lifelong process. But I promise you this: If you read this book and seek to apply what you learn, you'll discover a freedom that will surprise you with joy. (For further insight and motivation, check out some books I've found helpful on page 129.)

Yesterday I took my son's dog, a Chihuahua named El Niño (whom we call Mr. Neeners), for a walk along the shore of the Willamette River. Yeah, I know . . . what "man" would admit that his son owns a Chihuahua and that he takes it for a walk? Quite a contrast for a guy whose last dog was a 185-pound Great Dane named Big. I used to think a Chihuahua, which at six pounds weighs twice as much as the average human brain, was nothing more than an animal with the nervous system of a Great Dane compressed into a dog the size of a large rat. But now that Mr. Neeners and I are friends, I actually like the dog. He's smart, and unlike other Chihuahuas I've heard about, he doesn't snap at people with bared teeth or bark incessantly.

Anyway, as we walked along the rocky shore he tugged on the leash . . . pulling to get free. Finally, I unclipped the leash from

his collar. Liberated, Mr. Neeners jumped around, gave high fives to the other dogs, leaped high into the air, and performed a backward flip followed by a perfect four-paw landing. He then sniffed the water, barked at the ducks, and chased a ball.

As I reflect on the undiluted joy of my liberated little friend, I can't help but think about the joy you'll experience when you unclip the leash that holds you in check. If you crave the joy that comes with freedom, turn the page and read about the first rule you must break.

For Discussion

1. What healthy rules did you grow up with? What unnecessary rules do you remember from your childhood?
2. Can you name a senseless rule that you've come up against in the last month or two? Explain.
3. Why are God's moral laws so important?
4. How do his laws differ from man-made add-on rules?
5. What do you hope to get out of this book?

1

THE RULE OF PASSIVITY

NEVER GET IN A FIGHT

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

MATTHEW 12:13-14

The junior high I attended in Roswell, New Mexico, allowed students to leave campus for lunch. Normally that worked well, but not always. One day my friend Ben Smith and I exited Al's, a local hamburger joint, after downing a burger and some fries. Here's where the "not always" part happened. As we stepped outside, six or seven older guys with bad intentions met us. Specifically, they had bad intentions for me.

Jerry Ralston, a kid older and meaner than the rest of us, a kid who had repeated several grades, a kid I did not want to fight, shoved me in the chest. Before I could react, one of his assistant assassins grabbed my shirt by the back of the collar and ripped it open. Ben, sensing nobody had any interest in him and realizing he could get hurt, took off . . . a course of action I never let him forget.

One benefit of the surprise attack was that I didn't have time to fear anything. If I had known Jerry planned on ambushing me after lunch, I would have been freaking out all morning. Of

course, at the time of the fight I hadn't yet identified that benefit. To this day I don't know why, of all the kids in the school, Jerry selected me for such special attention.

Anyway, I would have run like Ben but Jerry's cohorts had formed a circle around me and I couldn't get away. That disappointed me, because while I might not have been tougher than Jerry and his friends, I knew I could outrun them. I thought about falling down and playing dead, like a possum, but figured they'd never buy that act. So I did the only thing I could do. I fought.

I actually surprised myself, as well as Jerry and his friends, by landing a couple of punches. But every time I hit Jerry, someone would grab at my shirt—eventually ripping it off. Or one of his buddies would shove me from behind. Somehow I lost the shoe off my right foot and one of his wannabe-tough friends threw it on the roof of the hamburger joint. Realizing Jerry couldn't lose and wanting to get back to school, his friends declared him the winner.

I'm sure I looked cool walking back to school with my shredded shirt and single shoe. When we were across the street from the campus, Jerry grabbed my arm. The two of us stopped while his gang ran across the street and headed into the school. That's when he said some unkind words about me and my mother, told me he really didn't like me, and threatened to seriously injure me at a later date.

A QUICK ASSESSMENT

It's funny how quickly I assessed the situation—pros and cons and all of that—and arrived at a decision. If I could have thought that quickly in the classroom I would have made straight As. On

the “hit him now” side of the ledger I put: avoid days, weeks, months, years, or decades of paralyzing fear; hurt him enough that he won’t want to fight me again; let him beat me now and get it out of his system; my shirt is already shredded, my shoe is on the roof of Al’s hamburger joint, and I’ve already got a bruised face. On the “walk away” side of the ledger I put: hmmm—I couldn’t think of a single reason not to finish the fight since he was alone without his support team.

He was as surprised by my right fist to his left cheek as I was by his earlier ambush outside Al’s. Before he could recover I had pummeled him with punches. At about that time a teacher saw the fight, raced across the street, and broke it up.

Of course, nobody but the teacher had seen the last round, so the buzz at school was that I had been beaten to a pulp by Jerry. I didn’t care. He knew. I knew. And I hoped he’d never bother me again because I feared the guy. That’s right. Remember, he was older and bigger than me and had a bad reputation.

A few weeks later Ben and I were at the YMCA playing hoops when Jerry entered the gym. Ben was nice enough to say, “Hey, Jerry, Perkins said you weren’t as tough as everybody thinks and that he ripped you apart.”

I looked at Ben, dumbfounded. Had he really said that? Sure, I had told Ben—my confidant, my partner in crime, the guy I hung with all the time—that I had taken care of Jerry. I trusted Ben because, well, because I knew his secrets and he knew mine. Yes, I had bragged to Ben that I had beaten Jerry. But every day when I saw Jerry at school, I felt a rush of fear. And now terror fueled by adrenaline raced through my body. My heart rate must have jumped to at least two hundred beats per minute.

While I stood both dumbfounded and terrified, Jerry did the unexpected. He seemed uncomfortable . . . uncertain what to say. So he said nothing. He smiled a cocky smile and walked away. Jerry never bothered me again.

LIFE'S A BATTLEGROUND

From my fight with Jerry, I learned that life is a battleground. And not all fights can be avoided. But it seems as though followers of Christ are expected to be so humble, so meek, so mature, so passive, so submissive, that men sometimes try to avoid a fight at all costs. (I realize that this lengthy list may seem extreme to you, but a lot of guys believe that's what Christian men are like, and they want no part of it.) After all, won't a truly humble and believing man trust God to fight for him? I read somewhere that churches are filled with nice people learning from other nice people how to be nicer people. And nice people don't fight. I'm not talking about whether Christians should go looking for a fistfight. I'm talking about whether Christians should defend themselves or take on an evil or misguided opponent. I'm talking about whether believers should break the law of passivity and get in a fight.

My concern about the passivity of Christian men goes back a long time. I had only been a believer a year or so when I saw Joel Walters, a Christian friend from Austin, Texas, where I was living at the time, attacked by a guy in the parking lot of his apartment building. Joel was an athletic guy with a strong build. As he opened the door to his Volkswagen, a fellow about his size, wearing jeans and a T-shirt, approached him. The two exchanged heated words and then the stranger popped Joel in the nose with a quick right. Instead of defending himself, Joel

stood with his hands at his side and said, “I’m a Christian. I don’t fight.”

From across the parking lot I thought I must have misheard him. But Joel said it again, “I’m a Christian. I don’t fight.” The guy hit him again and walked off.

I remember thinking that Joel didn’t fight because he was afraid to fight. I figured he used his faith to cover his cowardice. But later he expressed pride about the fact that he let some guy hit on him without fighting back. Joel talked as though his passivity proved his devotion to God. But I never believed him. And I still don’t. He was afraid to fight because he figured he would get hurt less if he took a punch or two without defending himself. I believe that attitude produces passive men who are easily pushed around and taken advantage of. And that mind-set carries over to other areas of life.

Yes, I know people like to point to Matthew 5:39, where Jesus urged his followers to turn the other cheek when hit on the face. As I pointed out in *Six Battles Every Man Must Win*, I don’t believe Jesus was telling us not to defend ourselves.¹ I think he was teaching us not to allow someone to control our behavior. If I’m hit and retaliate, the person who hit me has control over my behavior. Jesus wanted his followers to submit to him, not to their passions or the threats of an enemy. Retaliation puts us under the control of the attacker, not Christ. He also wanted to break the cycle of violence—revenge that still racks the Middle East today. The only way to break this is a heroic “turning of the other cheek.”

About now you may be wondering if I’m suggesting we start a Christian version of *Fight Club*. In that movie Brad Pitt plays

the part of soap salesman Tyler Durden, who created a fighting club for men as a way of escaping the boredom of their lives.

No, that's not what I'm saying at all. What I am driving at is this: As followers of Christ we need to realize that we're warriors

For God's kingdom to advance, his followers must enter the fray and fight.

in a battle between two opposing kingdoms. We're in a battle between light and darkness . . . good and evil . . . between God and his army of angels and Satan and his legion of demons. For God's kingdom to advance, his followers must enter the fray and fight. Could you imagine an army in which the troops are taught *not* to fight? We need to break the law of passivity and fight.

It might surprise you that the two battles I think followers of Christ most need to fight are legalism and hypocrisy. Yet they are the very ones Jesus engaged in.

FIGHT LEGALISM

Take an hour or so and read through the Gospels. As you do, note how many times Jesus hammers away at drunks, prostitutes, crooked politicians, dishonest businessmen, drug addicts, con artists, gays, and thieves. Your list will be short . . . very short. That's because Jesus didn't fight with these people, he hung out with them. The people he challenged were the legalistic religious leaders.

Many churches today have that turned around. They condemn sinners, and their members hang out with the civilized—should I say legalistic—elements of the church. Many of these religious folk attempt to live up to the add-on rules of their church . . . often unsuccessfully. And many live in fear that someone will catch them breaking those rules.

Resist the Spiritual Police

After picking up a few items at the grocery store, I got in the checkout line behind the pastor of a large church. Although we're friends, I could tell he didn't want to talk. He seemed to be avoiding me like a man who sees his former boss, the one who fired him for padding his expense account.

As he stood in line putting his items on the conveyer belt, he awkwardly slipped a bottle of Cabernet onto the belt—as though he were buying Just For Men, Rogaine, or Preparation H and didn't want me to notice.

"Looks like a great dinner," I said.

"I'm on vacation. The wine is for dinner at my home . . . just my wife and me."

I looked down to see if I was wearing a uniform and badge. He seemed to have identified me as a member of the spiritual police and acted as if I had caught him breaking the rules and would soon ticket him.

I tried to think of something cool to say, but couldn't. So I just said, "Oh."

As I climbed in my car, I could identify with that pastor's fear. I remembered an experience I had over fifteen years ago in an upscale restaurant in Lake Oswego, Oregon, the city where I lived and was pastoring a church at the time. As I looked around at the people enjoying lunch, I asked myself, *How many of these people would I feel comfortable inviting to my church?* I concluded I wouldn't ask any of them. Why? Because I didn't think the church culture would provide a safe point of entry for them. Many of these people were drinking beer or wine with their meal. At the time if I drank a glass of wine, I would have to do so in the privacy of my home. I feared the spiritual police might

disapprove of my freedom. I understood how that pastor felt . . . and I was glad I had finally decided not to let legalistic people control my life.

Recognize Add-On Rules

But Jesus did more than that. He fought the Pharisees, those who had burdened the Jews with legalistic rules that they had added on to God's commands. He assertively took the battle to them. The opening sentences to this chapter tell the story of the man whose hand Jesus healed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:13). The Lord knew his act would violate their add-on rule and so he broke it intentionally. How did they respond? They conspired to kill him.

On another occasion the religious leaders protested when the Lord's disciples violated the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before eating bread. This add-on rule was more than a parent's reminder for their kids to wash up before a meal. Jewish tradition demanded that the faithful wash before and after every meal and whenever they came home from town. And they had to wash according to very strict ceremonial restrictions. Don't underestimate how important such traditions were to most Jews. They would rather walk miles to water than incur guilt by not washing their hands.

Later, when the religious leaders asked Jesus why his disciples violated this tradition of the elders (read: add-on rules), he didn't rebuke his disciples and tell them to go clean up before dinner. Instead, he asked the religious leaders why they violated the command of God for the sake of their traditions. Jesus reminded them that God commanded them to honor their parents. Yet the Pharisees taught people to tell their needy parents

that all they possessed had been dedicated to God. According to their tradition, anything pledged in that way—whether it was given or not was irrelevant—could not be given to the parents. In that way, the tradition freed a man from his responsibility to obey God’s command and care for his parents.

Jesus then turned to the crowd and explained that true defilement comes from within a man—from his heart, not his hands. A man can’t be defiled by eating with unwashed hands, but by an evil heart filled with evil thoughts. This contradicted the Pharisees, who thought only that which touched them from the outside could make them unclean. Since they meticulously followed their traditions and kept themselves clean on the outside, the Pharisees believed they pleased God.

It seems odd to me that the disciples somehow thought Jesus was unaware of how his words affected the religious leaders. They remind me of a kid in the back of a class who raises his hand to state the obvious: “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

Not backing off, Jesus said, “Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”²

ACT BOLDLY

Why did Jesus fight so tirelessly against legalism? Because he knew it substitutes rules for a friendship with God. It exchanges external conformity for internal obedience. It creates fear and steals joy. The problem persists today. Because men will always add on to grace, the battle will never end.

Legalism substitutes rules for a friendship with God. It exchanges external conformity for internal obedience.

About five hundred years ago, another man dared to challenge the religious leaders of his day, only to find out how difficult that can be. Martin Luther will always be remembered for posting his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. This act served as a challenge to church leaders to debate ninety-five important issues.

Why had he taken that bold step? As a monk in the Roman Catholic Church, Luther had begun teaching on the New Testament book of Romans at the university. As he contemplated Romans 1:17, “The righteous will live by faith,” he realized a man was made right with God by faith alone—a truth the church of his day had buried beneath a mountain of greed, corruption, and legalistic false teaching. Most offensive to Luther was the practice of selling indulgences—certificates sold by the church promising to shorten a person’s stay in purgatory. Johann Tetzel, whom the pope had assigned to sell indulgences in Luther’s vicinity, advertised the certificates this way: “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”

At first the pope said little about the 95 Theses, hoping to suppress Luther’s views with silence, figuring if he ignored them, Luther would go away. When that failed, he issued a decree condemning Luther’s views and calling on him to recant forty-one of his theological positions. Rather than walking away, Luther publicly burned the papal decree, and he was excommunicated in January 1521. Later that year, when Luther was called to appear before a government body, he again refused to recant. He ended his remarks this way: “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. . . . Here I stand, I can do no other.”

A single man passionate about the liberating power of the gospel changed world history because he fought legalism.

Luther loved the power of the gospel more than the civilized and established religion of his day.

Likewise, Jesus fought legalism and loved sinners. He lived and fought and died so men could enter into a friendship with God—on the basis of faith . . . not by keeping a bunch of man-made rules. In the next chapter, we'll explore some of the add-on rules that are worth fighting. But there is another fight that's equally important.

FIGHT HYPOCRISY

I became a full-fledged card-carrying hypocrite while just a child. It happened at an age I can't even remember. But I know I was young—like in grade school. It had to do with swearing, or as we called it back then, cussing.

I don't know who taught me to cuss. I never attended a class or read a book on the subject. But by the time I was in the fifth grade (I'm just picking that grade because it seems as good a guess as any other grade—it could have been sooner), I had a fully developed vocabulary of cusswords. In fact, after that age I never added a single cussword to my vocabulary. What set me apart from my friends was that I cussed all the time *around them*. I doubt that a single sentence left my mouth without a profanity. If those words had been deleted from my conversations, I would have seemed like a rather quiet child.

Know Yourself

While my parents occasionally cussed, they did not approve of such language, so I never cussed around them. And it was easy. I think that's when I realized I had a secret person living inside my outer person. It gave me a sense of power too. I

never felt a sliver of guilt about my double life. Occasionally, when I thought my dad had heard me cussing, I felt fear, but not guilt.

While I don't remember learning to cuss, I do remember learning to steal. A couple of older boys encouraged me to go into a grocery store and stuff a few Snickers into my pockets and leave without paying for them.

"What if I get caught?" I asked.

"You won't."

I think I had a natural talent for stealing because it came so easily to me. Just like with cussing, I never felt a tinge of guilt. And then one day I got caught. I was in a grocery store and had crammed so much candy into my pockets they bulged like baseballs.

The manager of the store approached me and asked, "What's in your pockets?"

I cussed to myself, then said, "Candy."

"Where did you get it?"

"Over there," I said as I pointed at the candy rack.

"Put it back," he said. "And don't ever try stealing from me again."

I returned *most* of the candy to the shelf. I figured he'd never think a little kid would actually steal after being caught. But I did.

Now here's the bad part. The manager knew my dad, so I lived in daily fear that he would tell on me. That's when prayer became an important part of my life. I begged God not to let my dad find out. I promised never to cuss or steal again if God would answer this one prayer.

And then the unexpected happened . . . the manager of the

store was killed in a car wreck outside of Roswell. I felt such relief. Dad would never discover my secret. I wondered if God had organized the wreck in answer to my prayers. I didn't think so. Then I felt guilty for feeling so happy that the manager had died. My inner voice told me that anyone who celebrates the death of a man with a wife and kids is a bad person. And yet I knew that I could hide my inner person from my parents and just about anyone else. My parents didn't know the cussing, stealing little kid. Only my friends, like Ben, knew that part of me. And I could even hide my inner person from him.

Recognize the Danger of Hypocrisy

What I discovered as a child all of us realize at one time or another. We're all two people—an inner and an outer person. And we're all capable of pretending to be someone we're not. That's what makes religion dangerous. It trains people to be spiritual hypocrites. It accomplishes this through legalism that provides the external rules and expectations to measure spirituality. Because nobody can see our secret self, if we practice keeping the rules, our outer man will appear good and moral and godly. At home our wives and our children may see the darker person. But they usually won't tell on us. Some of the more shameful behavior—like peeking at porn on the Internet—we hide even from them.

Jesus liked sinners more than the religious leaders because they didn't try to disguise themselves. With them, what you saw was what you got.

A hypocrite is someone who lives a double life. He's a man who is different on the inside than he appears on the outside. I think Jesus liked sinners more than the religious

leaders because they didn't try to disguise themselves. They might steal, fornicate, and swear, but they weren't hypocrites. With them, what you saw was what you got.

Because I learned hypocrisy from such an early age, I have to guard myself from it at all times. It's hard because I know how other Christians expect me to think and act. I realize they look to leaders as less sinful than everyone else. Yet I know I'm just as flawed as the next guy. And I know whenever a man pretends to be less marred or more together than others, he lacks integrity. The next time you find yourself thinking a leader is somehow wired differently than the rest of us, remember that the wisest, strongest, and godliest men in the Old Testament . . . Solomon, Samson, and David . . . all fell.

Understand Hypocrisy

Jesus waged an ongoing war against hypocrisy. Toward the end of his ministry, even as Jesus urged the people to obey the law of Moses, he warned them about the Pharisees. And his message was clear:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”

MATTHEW 23:13

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”

MATTHEW 23:14

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”

MATTHEW 23:15

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

MATTHEW 23:23

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

MATTHEW 23:25

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

MATTHEW 23:27

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”

MATTHEW 23:29, ALL NASB

I think there are two kinds of hypocrites: the self-deceived and the deceivers. The self-deceived believe the lie about themselves. They have developed such a sophisticated system of self-protection that they are blind to their own flaws. They're like the psychotic actor who believes he is the character he plays.

You may wonder how someone could live like that. I called my friend Dr. Rodney L. Cooper, a clinical psychologist and educator, and asked him that very question. He said they isolate or split off the destructive section of their personality and live as though the behavior driven by that part doesn't define the real them.

“Sounds crazy to me,” I said.

“It is,” he said. “But we all do it every day.”

That statement got my attention. “We do?”

“Sure. We're all going to die but we seldom think about that. We certainly don't live as though we could die at any moment. Self-deceived hypocrites do that with their secret and sinful behavior. They just don't think about it.”

That leaves us with the hypocrite who's in touch with his dark behavior and knowingly deceives people into thinking he's better than he is.

“That guy has a seared conscience,” Rod said. “He's like the

priest who molests children but pretends to care for his parishioners. Or the man who is hooked on porn or addicted to alcohol but serves as an elder in his church.”

Since Rod’s one of my best friends, I figured I’d ask him a more threatening question. “But I’m a hypocrite sometimes, aren’t I? I mean, I know how to be sincere, even if I have to fake it.”

“Funny, Perkins,” he said. “We’re all hypocrites at times. But there’s a difference between a man who occasionally acts hypocritically and one who always lives behind a mask.”

After hanging up the phone I pondered what Rod had said. I don’t know if the Pharisees were self-deceived or deceivers or both. But I know I don’t want to be either. I don’t want to live with the constant fear that someone will discover the darker, hidden me. Nor could I live with the knowledge that the person my family and friends knows isn’t the real me. And in order to effectively fight hypocrisy I’ve got to continually take a ruthless inventory of my thoughts, words, and deeds. I must live authentically. If I can lie to myself and minimize or justify wrong behavior, then lying to others will be easy.

So how do we fight legalism and hypocrisy? I can tell you what I do.

- ▶ I evaluate my own behavior, asking myself if I’m acting in obedience to a biblical command or a man-made rule. If it’s a man-made rule, I want to know if I’m following it out of sensitivity to others or because I fear rejection. The former is a good reason; the latter is ultimately self-destructive.
- ▶ I try to assess if I’m pretending to be someone I’m

not. If so, I remind myself that God values authenticity, not hypocrisy . . . and so do I.

But I also need to gently address these issues in others—especially my family and friends.

- When I see legalism elsewhere, I ask questions and graciously take on the rule. It's one thing to keep my mouth shut when eating—that's good manners—it's another to keep it shut when I see something amiss.
- I remind myself that Christ called me to a friendship, not a religious system of rule-keeping.

In many respects I think fighting legalism and hypocrisy is like fighting racism. Why? Because everybody denies they're a racist. Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm a racist"? I haven't. Yet, I've heard people talk like racists. And when I've said, "I think you sound like a racist," they've never said, "Of course I do. I am a racist." Nor have they thanked me for pointing out a blind spot. Instead, they've gotten defensive and argumentative.

And I've seldom had a clearly legalistic or hypocritical Christian agree with me that he was being legalistic or hypocritical. Instead, he's accused me of straddling the moral fence or judging him. He's argued that his rules are biblical and essential to spiritual growth and purity.

I'd like to know how legalism and hypocrisy got such a stranglehold on Christian men. I'm not sure, but I suspect that religious and well-intentioned men and women put rules into

*Christ calls
you to a
friendship,
not a religious
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keeping.*

place aimed at protecting weak believers. Such rules made sense, so everyone went along with them. Over time the rules became as authoritative as doctrine.

But for that to happen men who knew the difference between grace and legalism and authenticity and hypocrisy stood back and said nothing. I say it's time for men to follow the example of Jesus and fight this battle. I believe the future health of the church rests on the willingness of a few men to do what's right, not what's easy. And I believe legalism and hypocrisy will gang up to beat you down unless you take the fight to them.

YOU'LL NEVER FIGHT ALONE

I won the fight against Jerry Ralston by standing up to him. A few years later though, I found that sometimes that isn't enough. When I was in the ninth grade, Ron Kompton, a fellow student, despised me. At well over six feet tall and over 200 pounds, Ron looked like a man among boys. His fist seemed as big as my head.

One night at a party, I spotted Ron arriving late. I tried to turn invisible, but under pressure that trick never seemed to work. Anyway, Ron hunted me down and started calling me names and hitting me in the chest with the bridge of his upturned hands. Unlike my earlier fight with Jerry Ralston, I would never so much as lay a finger on Ron. Everyone at the party knew that. And it excited them. They smelled blood—or death—depending on whether Ron was willing to go to prison for murder.

I understood how a bull must feel just before the matador begins his bloody business. As we stood in the front yard of the house with a crowd of kids urging us to “get it on,” something totally unexpected happened. Something so wonderful and so

amazing and so astounding and so excellent that I knew there had to be a God.

A car screeched to a halt just in front of the house. A moment later the car door opened and then slammed shut, and someone yelled, “Kompton!”

It wasn’t Superman or Batman or Spider-Man—it was my friend, at that moment my best friend, Mike Temple. Mike was the only guy in town bigger and meaner than Ron Kompton. Before graduating from high school, Mike made the all-state football team twice as a fullback. Later he played college ball for Oklahoma State. He and I were like brothers, and he enjoyed a good fight. I loved that guy!

Mike pushed his way through the crowd, walked up to Ron, shoved him back hard, and said, “Kompton, if you’re going to touch Perkins, you’ll have to go through me!”

With a surge of courage and, yes, even cockiness, I said, “That’s right, Kompton, and don’t you ever forget it!”

Ron started whimpering about how he didn’t realize Mike and I were buddies, and he promised never to hassle me again.

I like that story because it illustrates how Jesus fights for me. If I abide in him and focus on our friendship, Christ will assure my victory. Sometimes it takes more than sheer grit and will-power to win a fight—including the one against entrenched legalism and hypocrisy. The good news is you’ll never have to fight alone.

For Discussion

1. Matthew 12:9-13 describes what conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders? Why do you think Jesus didn't just walk away when challenged by the Pharisees?
2. Which better describes your spiritual life currently: a friendship with Christ or a religious system of rule-keeping? Explain.
3. Legalism is a form of religion that teaches men are made right with God by keeping add-on rules. Why must you fight such a view? What could happen if you don't? What could happen if you do?
4. How can a legalistic form of religion create hypocrites?
5. As you read this chapter, did you recognize any seeds of legalism or hypocrisy within yourself? What might you do to prevent them from growing?

BREAK THE RULE:

How will you break the rule of passivity and fight legalism and hypocrisy? Discuss both your attitudes and actions.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

It occurred to me that you might find it hard to actually break the six rules discussed in this book. After all, it's normal to associate punishment with breaking rules. That's what life teaches us.

For instance, until recently I felt great pride because I had gone eighteen years without a single traffic ticket. I achieved this amazing record by paying close attention to the speed limit and my car's speedometer. In fact, to reward myself for always driving the speed limit, I bought a radar detector. Of course, I didn't buy it to warn me of a speed trap so I could slow down—since I never speed. Rather, whenever it would flash and beep, indicating the presence of a policeman with a radar gun, I'd look at my speedometer and smile—pleased that I was going the posted speed. In that way the radar detector served as a pat on the back—an “Attaboy” for my compliance with the law. As I would pass the speed trap, I'd wave and smile at the officer . . . we made a tight team.

You can imagine my shock, then, when a motorcycle cop pulled me over during rush-hour traffic. One thing I knew for sure, I wasn't speeding. Nobody was speeding. I figured maybe a brake light had burned out.

The cop parked behind me and approached my window. “Give me your driver's license, registration, and proof of insurance,” he barked. It was a hot summer day, and I could tell he wasn't in a friendly mood. Not a good sign if I had committed a moving violation . . . an impossibility, I was sure, since I had spotted him a mile back.

As the cars, trucks, busses, and bikes swooshed by, stirring

up dust and swirling around loose trash, the officer took my papers and walked to the rear of the car. Standing there, he opened his ticket ledger and began writing. I knew that a ticket is written in stone and cannot be unwritten. So unless he was writing me a warning, I would have no chance to invite him to join my team by helping me keep an unblemished driving record. Nor could I appeal to his sympathetic side by mentioning the fact that I was paying insurance for a family with three teenage boys, and I alone, with my perfect driving record, kept our car insurance payment lower than the national debt.

As those despairing thoughts filled my mind, he slapped shut his ledger, walked to my window, tore out the ticket, and handed it to me. That's when I noticed he wore a portable sauna—a helmet and black leather coat—someone once told me such clothes help keep a biker cool. He looked cool, but appeared hot. With everything going against me, I hoped that maybe, just maybe, in spite of the heat, traffic, and exhaust fumes, he nurtured a sense of humor.

“Is this an invitation to the annual police fund-raising circus?” I asked.

“No. It's a ticket. Pay it or challenge it in court.”

He started to walk away when I asked, “What's it for?”

He looked at me and smile-snarled. “Changing lanes without using your turn signal.”

Hmm. I didn't even know that was against the law. Until that moment I thought using the turn signal was a courtesy.

“I thought that was a courtesy,” I said.

“Yeah, well you're wrong,” he said as he climbed on his bike.

Eighteen years without a blemish on my record, and I got a ticket for failing to use my turn signal! I gripped my steering

wheel hard. And then I remembered the words of my youngest son Paul. The memory triggered an involuntary spasm of my hands, and I gripped my steering wheel harder. I ground my teeth and banged my head on my hands, which held the top of the steering wheel.

“Dad, did you know it’s against the law to change lanes without using your turn signal?” Paul had asked. “I thought you’d like to know since you’ve been switching from one lane to another without using it.” He’d uttered those words just six months earlier. I had heard what he said but his words didn’t register—until I sat there banging my head.

So I paid a fine for breaking a law that I didn’t even know existed. Of course during those spotless eighteen years I deserved many tickets. I had violated traffic laws 11,763 times. I just never got caught. And every time I broke a speeding law, I knew if I got caught I’d have to pay a fine. That’s the way life works. Right? Do the crime, pay the fine.

Yet I’m suggesting you break six rules and saying you’ll be rewarded for it. I’m insisting that joy comes with grace and freedom, not rules and punishment. I know Jesus would tell you the same thing. The apostle Paul discovered that truth. For years he proudly served as a Pharisee, obsessively obeying Jewish rules and regulations, even hunting down people who violated those rules. Yet one day he met the risen Christ who liberated him from the chains of legalism.

Infused by God’s grace, Paul possessed the strength to never again submit to the yoke of man-made rules. His life became a testimony to the joy experienced by the man who consistently breaks these six rules. In case you think I’m exaggerating, consider how he broke the rules outlined in this book:

- ▶ *The Rule of Passivity: Never Get in a Fight.* Paul publicly confronted Peter when he compelled Gentile believers to follow Jewish traditions (Galatians 2:11-14).
- ▶ *The Rule of Playing It Safe: Never Risk It All.* Paul risked everything when he embraced the gospel of grace and rejected legalism. In Colossians 2:16-17 (NLT) he said, “Don’t let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days. . . . For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.” His stance angered many Jews, and he often paid the price. After preaching in Antioch, “the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region” (Acts 13:50).
- ▶ *The Rule of Perseverance: Never Give Up* and *The Rule of Independence: Never Ask for Help.* Paul didn’t cling to his impressive religious credentials and Jewish ancestry but said he considered them worthless compared to the unsurpassed greatness of knowing Christ (see Philippians 3:3-14).
- ▶ *The Rule of Restraint: Never Lose Your Cool.* Paul expressed his anger when he discovered some of the Corinthian believers were filing lawsuits against one another (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). He obviously got mad

at Barnabas and the two even parted company for a while (Acts 15:36-41).

- *The Rule of Impressing Others: Never Look Stupid.*
Paul's entire life spoke of a man devoted to pleasing God alone. After encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus, he willingly laid aside his reputation to serve Christ. His letters testify to God's supernatural power at work within him. Yet at the same time, he understood that he and his fellow Christians would look stupid to others. He even told the Corinthians that the message of the cross is "foolishness to those who are perishing" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The reason I got a ticket is because I broke a legitimate law. Changing lanes without using a turn signal puts other drivers and me at risk. It didn't matter whether I knew the law or not. That regulation was warranted.

The six rules I'm urging you to break, however, are illegitimate. They're phantom rules. Mirages. They're not God-given but man-made. Breaking them may earn you the ire of some Christians. But breaking them will also bring you freedom . . . and with freedom, joy. So go ahead . . . unclip the leash and turn yourself over to the grace of God.

ENDNOTES

1. Bill Perkins, *Six Battles Every Man Must Win* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 23.
2. The complete account of Jesus' clash with the Pharisees and the disciples' response can be found in Matthew 15:1-20.
3. Malachi 3:9-10 says, "'You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. 'Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.'"

This passage is often used today to prompt believers to give their tithes to the local church. The idea is that the church today has replaced the Temple as the "storehouse" for tithes. Following this logic, a failure to tithe to the local church would be stealing from God.

It's important to remember that this message was not written for Christians. It was addressed to "the whole nation" (Malachi 3:9).

4. For more information on one of my favorite sources of green coffee beans—and information on how to roast them—check out <http://www.sweetmarias.com>.
5. Ken Gentry, dean of faculty and professor of systematic theology at Westminster Classical College, has written some thorough and thought-provoking articles on Scripture's stance toward the moderate use of alcohol. These have helped me formulate my own convictions on this topic. His book *God Gave Wine* (Oakdown, 2001) covers this subject in much greater depth than I can in this book. I encourage you to read it if you'd like more biblical insight on the subject.
6. From a letter to the editor of *The Daily Telegraph* (September 23, 1874), written by Charles Spurgeon.
7. Perkins, *Six Battles*, 131.
8. In John 15:2, the verb "cut off" comes from the Greek word *airo*. It should be translated "lifts up." The meaning is consistent with the verse, and nowhere else in the New Testament or other Greek literature does the word mean "cut off." For more on this, see Bruce Wilkinson,

6 RULES EVERY MAN MUST BREAK

Secrets of the Vine: Breaking Through to Abundance (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2001), 33.

9. Perkins, *Six Battles*, 135.

10. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

11. Gary Chapman, *The Other Side of Love* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 19.

12. Ibid., 20.

13. Ibid., 21

14. W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, 1940), 57.

15. Chapman, *The Other Side of Love*, 183.

16. From the *MasterWriter* software program, MasterWriter Inc., copyright © 2002.

17. John Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 17.