



Lake Wales
Church of Christ
463 N. Buck Moore Rd.
Lake Wales, FL 33898
www.lakewalescoc.com
(863) 676-4114

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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

Why Does God Boss Us Around?

I had driven down to the beach to explore and enjoy the view, but found my way hedged in on all sides by signs.

The first sign said, “Welcome to East Beach, Village of Port Jefferson.” But then it said, “permit parking only” and “NO alcoholic beverages, NO dogs, NO open fires.” And it declared “beach opens June 28, closes Sept. 1. It didn’t make me feel all that welcome, but since I had no booze, canines, or matches, I felt fine. Plus, it was still late August. I had no parking permit, but since I was visiting a resident of Port Jefferson, I figured I could talk my way out of that one if necessary, and proceeded to pull into the parking lot. There were no other cars in the lot anyway.

But the prohibitive signs seemed to multiply. Another sign declared, “beach hours, 10am – 6pm.” Luckily it was around noon.

As I stepped out of the car, in front of my car was a sign that said, “NO vehicles beyond this point.” Fine, I know better than to drive on beach sand.

To the right was a sign that said, "NO lifeguard on duty, swimming PROHIBITED." Well, I *had* brought a bathing suit, and there was no dangerous surf to speak of, so that sign was getting annoying. Maybe I could just walk around instead.

In front of me was a small sign that said, "NO trespassing on rocks. Violators will be ticketed section 181-6H of Village code disorderly conduct, conducting himself contrary to any posted rule or regulation, fine \$500, STRICTLY ENFORCED." (Yes, it said all that. I took pictures of all these signs because they so annoyed me.) Well, I guess I wouldn't be scrambling around on the interesting rocks and investigating the shore life living in the tide pools.

Just a few feet behind me rose up pleasantly forested and flower-covered hills. I turned to explore there, but found my way blocked by another sign. "KEEP OFF cliffs \$200 fine." What? I couldn't go forward, and I couldn't go backwards! The narrow strip of sand was all that was available.

Things got boring fast, and as I returned to my car I noticed a vending machine. To top it all off, was another sign which declared, "Healthier vending machine, snacks and cold drinks." Sure enough, not a soda or candy bar in sight.

So, the powers-that-be in Port Jefferson decided that I could go to the beach, as long as I showed up only on 1/3 of the hours of 1/4 of the days, didn't bring my car, didn't touch the water, didn't touch the rocks, didn't stray into the hills, and wasn't in the mood for a Coke or a Baby Ruth. I began to dream of mischievous things I could do just to be annoying ("I'm sorry officer, there is no sign that says, "do NOT use heavy equipment to dig a hole to China!"). I began to understand why the parking lot was empty.

I think we all chafe under such strict rules. But this brings up another point, that many times people get this impression of God and His commandments. That they are designed to be controlling. To steal our joy and kill our fun. To confine us into a straight-jacket of behavior that barely allows us room to breathe. But, actually, God's commandments are not like that at all.

For Our Good

Deuteronomy 10:12–13 says,

“Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?”

When you boil it all down, the five books of the Law of Moses were quite simple: fear God, imitate God, love God, serve God, and obey God. And even obedience is “for your good.” Why did God give all these rules and regulations to the children of Israel? Because He wanted to make life more complicated? More difficult? No, because he wanted their lives to be better!

Why does any parent issue instructions? For his child’s good. Dating restrictions, places to stay away from, chores to do, bed-times, dessert quotas, all seem annoying to a rebellious child, but are designed to make him more healthy, more virtuous, and better prepared for life.

Hebrews 12:5–13 explicitly makes the comparison between the parenting decisions of God and the parenting decisions of our earthly fathers:

My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
Nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him;
For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
And He scourges every son whom He receives.”

Sometimes he says, “Don’t!” when we would rather do. Sometimes he says, “Do!” and would rather not. He never withholds blessings just to deprive us of pleasure (Matt. 7:9–11). His commandments are always given for our good and safety and growth. Let us trust Him! “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3).

To Make Us Holy As He Is Holy

God's commandments are not arbitrary. They are derived from His own holy nature; they are a reflection of His own being. God governs us "so that we may share His holiness" (Heb. 12:10). Peter says,

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior, because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1:14–16).

God prohibits stealing and loose living and lying and hating and drunkenness and the like because they are incompatible with His own character. If we want to dwell with Him eternally, we need to learn to love His ways (Heb. 12:14).

To Strengthen Our Love For Him

God never tempts us to do evil (James 1:13–15). However, God does test us periodically, that we might learn the blessings of trusting him obediently. God is cheering for our success and growth. For example, God told the ancient Israelites to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day, but didn't explain why. Sure enough, there were some who failed to obey, and only gathered one day's worth. On the seventh day when no manna fell, God explained the Sabbath. Those Israelites who didn't pay attention had to go hungry for a day. It didn't kill them, but hopefully they learned the importance of obeying God. (For similar tests, see Gen. 22:1–12, Deut. 8:2; Judges 3:4; 2 Chron. 32:31; John 6:6.) I'm convinced God withheld information to teach this very lesson.

As James 1:3 says, "the testing of your faith produces endurance." When faced with the choice to obey or disobey, God is watching. Even when we fail, He hopes that we will grow!
—*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

"You have lost your reason and taken the wrong path, you who exchange heaven for earth."
—*Anton Chekhov*