

15<sup>th</sup> June 2022

## Rules

**“Do not lay down any rules beyond what I appointed you, and do not give a law like the lawgiver lest you be constrained by it.”**

Jesus, attributed by Mary, *Berlin Codex, 'Gospel of Mary', Ch 4*

The late Professor William Barclay offers me an insight into Jesus' struggles with the Scribes and Pharisees, and how they used "rules" to define the Law and thus constrain the behaviour of the people. Take the commandment, "Honour the Sabbath Day and keep it holy", the part of the Law that says working on the Sabbath is wrong. A myriad of rules defined what people could or couldn't do on the Sabbath. "Imagine someone wearing stiletto heels," Barclay suggests, "walking on a hard-trodden path at the edge of a field. If a heel digs into the ground and disturbs the soil, that's deemed to be ploughing, which is work, and so the Sabbath Law is being broken." And he goes on. "Imagine someone moving a kitchen chair. If it has three spars or more on the back, it's considered to be a ladder, and as moving a ladder is work, the Law of the Sabbath is being flouted again."

Jesus had problems with the constraints of the Law as interpreted by the Scribes and Pharisees. Remember my guidance, he says. Love God and love your neighbour. If you get that right, you'll not need to be governed by the minutiae of human rules.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2022, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland heeded that guidance. After years of debate and a period of lengthy consultation, the highest court in our Church agreed to allow ministers the choice to officiate at same-sex marriages. For many it was a "rule" that no minister should be permitted to do such a thing. But now, it seems to me, my Church has chosen to heed the Law as given by Christ and is no longer constrained by rules created by so-called lawgivers.

At some point I shall, if invited, conduct the marriage of a same-sex couple. In so doing, I'll celebrate love where I find it – and not be bound by rules of ploughing with my heels or moving a chair-like ladder in my kitchen. God is Love and I love my God for that. And I'll love my neighbours if they are in love. There are no rules that'll stop me rejoicing in that.

### **A prayer for today**

*Jesus said: "Love one another as I have loved you." Sounds like good guidance! Amen*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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