

My Rights, Your Wrongs

(Part 3 of a 5-part series)

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Special to ChristianWeek*

Imagine yourself in significant conflict that ends up in a courtroom. You sit at one table; your opponent at another. You'll present your argument to a judge, hoping that you'll win your case.

You know what you've got to do to win. No anger, fear, or tears. Be cool as a cucumber. Stand straight. Look everyone in the eye. Speak eloquently. Use big words so you seem smarter than your opponent. Quote whatever law you can that vaguely supports your position; then even calculated half-truths might work in your favour. Most importantly: stay emotionally detached, but occasionally throw in some righteous indignation to make your opponent look more guilty.

You've probably seen this scenario in movies and on TV, and maybe in real life; but is it also part of your day-to-day family life?

Sadly, this lawyer-like attitude that we'll call a "law-keeper" is much too common in marriages and families. The law-keeper is the person in the family who insists that everyone *follow the rules*.

What rules?

Whatever rules back up their position. They talk about rules for people, money, politics, religion, or right living. Rules about sports, driving, construction, or how to mow the lawn. Rules about life *their way*.

A law-keeper's rules are rarely about righteousness; their rules are about *control*. Some rules are made up, some rules are not-so-common "common sense", and some rules are even available in print. The Bible can be their favourite behavioural rule book of all!

A law-keeping husband might quote "wives, submit to your husbands" (Eph 5:22) to compel his wife to do his bidding, praise him for providing, stop nagging when he's idle, even perform better and more often in the bedroom.

A law-keeping wife might quote "husbands, love your wives" (Eph 5:25) to make her husband tell her he loves her more often, control his leisure time and take her out instead, or get him to stop criticizing her cooking and cleaning.

A law-keeping parent might quote “children, obey your parents” (Eph 6:1) to make young ones believe that parental or house rules are God’s own rules, or “honour your father and mother” (Ex 20:12) later in life to make grown children obey unsolicited advice.

A law-keeping child might quote “fathers, do not provoke your children to anger” to get controlling parents to lay off and let them do what they want, when they want – or face a deliberate teen temper tantrum!

Let’s not forget business owners who might quote “slaves, obey your earthly masters...with a sincere heart”! (Eph 6:5)

Are these law-keepers right?

Not really. While the Biblical underpinnings might be correct, there’s a problem with the law-keeper’s heart: it’s cold, and they’re disconnected from the warmth, closeness and joy of relationship. Their rules (self-centered opinions) are stated to force others to do what they want, and they back it up from somewhere else.

Jesus spoke to law-keepers in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. (Lk 10:25-37). Those who strictly kept the law lacked compassion, and left another to suffer, even to die. That’s not righteousness; it’s self-righteousness.

Remember the courtroom?

What happens when you win the case? You win! You feel great! You’re vindicated! You got your justice! Maybe you even get compensated!

But do you still have a relationship with the other person?

Charles and Charlene are counselors/life coaches in private practice in Winnipeg MB. Join them for one of their many personal development and relationship workshops – see www.ccsg.com for details.