

## My House, My Rules Malachi 3:5-7

An unexplainable phenomenon occurs in homes across the world and has for generations. Somehow in adults who have children (it apparently doesn't happen unless they have children) there comes a time when the adults all of a sudden become stupid (oops, sorry, not smart – not supposed to use the word stupid) and lose any sense of understanding. Apparently their guidance mechanisms go hay-wire and their ability to see clearly is greatly diminished. Oh, and their expectations become unreasonable, too. When this happens varies; but, it usually takes place when their children transition from adolescence to teen. An equally interesting phenomenon is that after ten years, give or take a couple years, the adults in the home all of a sudden get smart again. Is it possible that those ten years of training by the teenagers has been successful?

I remember when all five of my brothers and I experienced this phenomenon with our mom and dad. We felt they were terribly unreasonable: 6:30am wake-up calls, chores before and after school, homework to be done before supper if at all possible, 11pm curfews on weekends and 10pm bedtimes on school days all the way through high school ... the list was endless. And dad was so unreasonable; he just wouldn't budge. "My house, my rules," he would say. "When you get your own house you can have your own rules." A couple of my brothers were so anxious to get from underneath Dad's "control" they enlisted in the service – one in the Army and the other in the Air Force. I never understood that.

But one thing remained steadfast: Dad's rules did not change; no matter how old we were. He had set the rules for a reason and believed them to be in our best interest. You see, Dad loved his sons and wanted the best for us. Therefore, as long as we lived under his roof he would provide everything we could need and in return he expected us to abide by his rules and conduct ourselves as members of his house.

In our study of Malachi thus far, God has shared with us just how much he loves us and that he desires us to live in intimate and lasting relationship with Him. God has also told of his heartbreak when his children are not fully living into that relationship with him. Like an earthly parent God wants only the best for his children. Jesus declared the Father's love for us this way, *"Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?"* (Mt.7:9-11). God wants what's in our best interest. Through Malachi, God shares it this way (**Read Text**).

To truly experience the blessings of God's house, there needs to be order. Parents, you know that a house without rules is a house of chaos. In fact, if we do not set boundaries it could be questioned whether or not we really love our children. So God established standards for living so that we will be able to enjoy and experience the full blessing of God. God even goes so far as to tell us, *"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline"* (Rev.3:19). God's House, God's Rules. God loves us and values us too much to settle for less than what is for our best. And so God says, *"I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob are not destroyed."* In other words, "I love you and know what's best for you. If I were to change my standards, you would lose." Again, Jesus confirmed this when he said, *"Seek first [God's] Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"* (Mt.6:33).

How often don't we act like teenagers who weary of the house rules thinking them too restrictive, wanting to stay out later at night or have fewer rules. We want more freedom. We want God to change the rules to make things easier for us. In fact, what we'd really like is to make our own rules and control our own lives. Like some teenagers who run away from home, wanting to get out on their own and experience the "real" world, we run away from God. And,

while God and his standards won't change, God waits longingly from the front door for us to return home so we can experience again God's best for us.

Where are you? How close or far are you from home?

Someone here may respond, "I have never been a part of God's house. I didn't run away; I was never there. I have no home to go to." So you have a void, a huge hole in your being that you've tried to fill with just about anything but nothing works. Still, there is something deep inside you that longs for the security and love of home. I want you to know that you have a home ... and you have a Father. You just don't know the way. Jesus is the way home; "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (Jn.14:6). And the way is really very easy; "*to those who believed in his (Jesus') name, he gave the right to become children of God*" (Jn. 1:12).

Some of you believe you are "home," you live under God's roof; but, you have failed to accept the fullness of God's love. God's rules are a burden. You do all the stuff, but not freely. You haven't quite grasped that God's standards and rules of the house are an expression of God's love for you and are really in your best interest. You work away at your Christian service, but haven't been "home." So God hasn't been able to make his home in you.

And still others of you might say, "I'm not sure God wants me in his home. I went to church and Sunday school as a kid; I was even part of the youth group as a teenager. I know about God. But that was a long time ago. What I did while I was gone ... I mean, are you sure God would take me back, that he would want me in his home?"

With the Israelites we honestly ask, "How are we to return?" We feel that in order to return to God we will have to do something spectacular to prove we deserve to go back to God. Or, we feel we can only go back to God if we are willing to be less than a son or daughter. But God has already answered our question, "*Return to me, and I will return to you.*"

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, just because you turn your back on God does not mean that God will turn his back on you. Listen to him calling, *“Return to me, and I will return to you.”* God will not force you to return. Any parent who has or has had teens will tell you the more you force them to submit, the further away they will go. Jesus says, *“I stand at the door and knock”* (Rev.3:20). God is a “gentleman” and waits for us to open the door.

Though our sin and rebellion created a gap between God and us, God became man in Jesus Christ and bridged that gap through his life, death, and resurrection. The result is that there is nothing between God and us except his love. We don’t need to earn it and there is nothing in this world that can separate us from His love (Rm. 8:38-39). God loves you and there is nothing you can do to change that.

The wonderful news is that when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we accept that God wants us home and a beautiful thing takes place: God makes his home in us. We as individuals and as the church are God’s home. It’s not our home and God is a guest. No, God makes his home in us. One thing remains true: God doesn’t change - God’s House, God’s Rules. God’s rules of the house must stand not because he demands to be in control but because God knows that the standards he established for living are in our best interests. He loves us too much to be destroyed. He loves us too much to ever want us anywhere but in his house.

No matter how close to or far away from home you feel you are, God loves you and wants the best for you. Hear God calling, *“Return to me, and I will return to you. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”*

Are you ready to let God love you? Will you commit to God’s house rules, God’s standards for living in order that you might experience the best of His love? Then I invite you to make that commitment with me using the prayer of Francis DeSales, a Christian in the early 1600’s. It’s on the screen. Will you pray it with me?