God’s Top 10: Rules for Love and Marriage
Taylor Swift has been making entertainment headlines since she released her first album at the age of 16. Her net worth is estimated at $220 million. An online magazine recently compiled "Taylor Swift's Rules About Love: A Comprehensive List." Here are some of her rules on the subject:

- "I never chase boys. They don't like it."
- "[Guys] can be a part of your life but never let the guy be your life. They can live in your world, but never make the guy your world."
- "Relationships are like traffic lights. And I just have this theory that I can only exist in a relationship if it's a green light."
- "Deciding not to play games is the best way to go because it keeps things simple: If he messes it up by playing around with your heart, you'll know he doesn't deserve you."
- "I think you can love people without it being the great love."

However, she also says, "I have rules for a lot of areas of my life. Love is not going to be one of them." So maybe her rules aren't rules after all.

Americans need advice on love and marriage. Our society leads the industrialized world in teenage pregnancy: one out of three girls in America becomes pregnant by the age of 20, 81 percent out of wedlock. Ninety percent of our youth have been exposed to pornography by the age of 18. Fifty percent of first marriages, 67 percent of second and 74 percent of third marriages end in divorce.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 1.8 million sexually transmitted diseases were reported in 2012. More than 1.1 million people in the U.S. are living with HIV infection. Since the epidemic began in 1981, more than 641,000 Americans have died of AIDS-related causes.

Clearly, our love rules aren't working very well.

What if we applied God's rules for love and marriage? His word offers a "top 10"—10 principles that, if practiced, would transform our homes and society. Let's set them out as clearly and concisely as possible.

**Rule #1: Sex is God's gift for heterosexual marriage**
God created humans as sexual beings, instructing us to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). Before the fall, "the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25).

Our Creator intends sexual intercourse to be between a man and his wife (Gen. 2:24). Jesus reinforced his Father's intention that "a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5; cf. Ephesians 5:31).

**Rule #2: Sex outside of marriage is always wrong**

We are repeatedly told, "you shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18; Matthew 19:18; Romans 13:9). We are not to have sexual relations with anyone who is not our spouse (Leviticus 18:6-18).

**Rule #3: Marriage is intended to be permanent**

Scripture teaches that "a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives" (1 Corinthians 7:39; cf. Romans 7:2). There are three clear exceptions:

- Divorce is permitted for adultery: "Everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery" (Matthew 5:32).
- Abandonment by an unbelieving spouse is also grounds for divorce: "If the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved" (1 Corinthians 7:15).
- I believe that abuse constitutes a third ground for "biblical" divorce, as life must be protected: "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13).

Malachi rebuked men who were faithless to "your companion and your wife by covenant" and asked, "Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union?" (Malachi 2:14, 15).

**Rule #4: Sexual purity begins with the mind**

Job testified, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1). Scripture consistently affirms such integrity:

- "Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).
- "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8).
• "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).
• "This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God . . . For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 7).

Rule #5: Sexual relations between people of the same gender are forbidden

This is a much-debated subject (see my "Homosexuality: A Biblical Overview"), but these Scriptures are clear and relevant:

• "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22; cf. 20:13).
• "God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error" (Romans 1:26-27).
• "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).
• "The law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Timothy 1:9-10).

Rule #6: Celibacy can be God's intention

The Bible forbids homosexual activity, not homosexual orientation. For those who are attracted to the same sex, God teaches purity and thus abstention. His Spirit will help those who are called to this difficult lifestyle: "I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another" (1 Corinthians 7:7).

Jesus taught, "There are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it" (Matthew 19:12). The Apostle Paul affirmed celibacy: "To the unmarried and
widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am" (1 Corinthians 7:8; cf. Revelation 14:4).

**Rule #7: Sexual sin harms us**

Scripture consistently warns that sexual immorality harms those who choose it:

- "He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away" (Proverbs 6:32-33; cf. 5:3-14).
- "The works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality . . . orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19, 21).
- "Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (Hebrews 13:4).

Sexual sin will always take you further than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you wanted to stay, and cost you more than you wanted to pay.

**Rule #8: Wives should encourage and respect their husbands**

Now we come to perhaps the most misunderstood teaching in Scripture regarding love and marriage. Ephesians 5:22-24 instructs: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands."

Could any teaching be more counter-cultural today?

Actually, Paul does not mean what most readers think he does. "Submit" translates the Greek word *hypotasso*, which can be rendered, "the voluntary decision to encourage and respect another." The verb is in the Greek middle voice, literally translated "place yourself in submission."

The wife is not in any sense inferior to the husband: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Rather, she chooses to respect and support her husband. He is created in such a way that he needs his wife's affirmation more than he needs the affirmation of any other person.

**Rule #9: Husbands should put their wives first**
In turn, men are taught: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). "Love" translates *agape*, which can be rendered, "the unconditional commitment to put another person first." Husbands are told to cherish their wives as their highest priority under Christ. Wives are to be more important than a husband's career, ambitions, goals, or any other relationship.

A wife is created in such a way that she needs to be cherished by her husband, to know that she is his "first love" under God. When wives encourage and respect their husbands, and husbands cherish their wives unconditionally and before all others, they align themselves with God's word and enable the Lord to bless their marriage.

One expert summarizes: "Men are motivated and empowered when they feel needed. . . . Women are motivated and empowered when they feel cherished." Every marriage needs encouraging respect and unconditional love.

**Rule #10: God calls us to purity**

Our bodies were designed for purity: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Corinthians 6:13). As a result, "sexual immorality and all impurity and covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Ephesians 5:3).

**Conclusion**

God's rules for love and marriage can be summarized simply: marriage is a covenant. Our culture views it as a contract which can be ended whenever either party wishes. Our Lord sees it as a covenant to which we make a permanent commitment.

John Adams once noted in his diary, "Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited! . . . What a Utopia, what a Paradise would this region be." Suppose our society took his advice, living by God's rules for love and marriage. What would be the impact on divorce, adultery, pornography, sexually transmitted disease, children and the family?

You may not be able to lead our nation to live by Scripture, but you can set an example for those you influence today. An evangelist was once asked how to begin a revival. His advice: "Go home, take a piece of chalk, and draw a circle around yourself. Then kneel inside that circle and pray until your life is right with God. When you are done, revival will have begun."

Can a moral revival in our culture begin with you?


7 All references are from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2002).

