

The Journey of Faith

Title: Part 4 – The Role of Rules

Date: April 28, 2024

Transition: Band continues softly.

Who's excited to be in God's house today? Come on, make some noise! If you are here for the first time, or you are joining us on our app or social channels, you picked a great one to be a part of as we continue a collection of messages called "The Journey of Faith." **AND here's what I believe.** I believe God wants to bless you today. I believe He already has through our amazing volunteers who serve every Sunday. I believe He has through the worship we just experienced as we encountered God. And I believe He's gonna bless you through the preaching of His Word. So, would you pray with me, and we will jump into this.

[PRAYER TIME]

Hey before you grab a seat why don't you find a few people around you and say "Hi." Thank you worship team.

So, as I mentioned we are in the fourth week of this journey that is centered around this premise:

Our faith journey began somewhere.

We know that every journey begins somewhere, everything begins somewhere, but sometimes we don't think about the fact that our faith journey began somewhere too.

For some of us in our childhood someone came along and said, "Here, believe this." It was probably your mom or dad or a grandparent, they took you to church, or took you somewhere, and they spoon-fed you all this stuff. And of course, you believed it all. You believed in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and Jesus and whatever else they told you to believe you were a kid. And it worked!

But then we hit high school, and we started wandering a little bit, we hit college, and we didn't even think about all that stuff, then we became adults, and we settled back into responsible living, at least most of us have... But at some point along the way, for many of us, there was this growing gap between what we'd been taught as children and what we experienced as adults. "Here's what I was taught, here's current reality, there is a gap, and I don't know if I can keep believing."

And for the most part nobody decides, "I'm not believing that anymore!" It just becomes irrelevant and next thing you know, you get busy, life happens, you experience some pain and heartbreak, and your faith slowly gets put on the back shelf next to your Barbies and Transformers.

So, what we decided to do is ask the question, **what would it look like to start over?** What would it look like to begin your journey of faith as an adult? What would it look like to begin asking some of those fundamental questions over again? That's what we have been talking about.

And, as I said before, we are in part four and each week builds, so if you missed the first three parts, grab our app or head to our website and all these messages are up there. If you have friends, and you're thinking, "Oh! I wish so and so could have seen this; I've been trying to explain that to them." All these messages will be there throughout the whole series so take advantage of them.

TODAY we're gonna tackle something that all of us have wrestled with at some point along the way. Today, as we keep moving toward answering the question "Who is Jesus." That's the beginning point, right? Not is the Bible true or was there really a flood or how could a good God allow bad things. Those are all important to wrestle through, but THE place you begin is WHO IS JESUS. So, as we keep moving our way there I want to talk about:

The role of rules

Because in every religion there are these pesky rules! And in every religion, there is a rule maker. And guess what? It never gets to be us, does it? But in every single religion, we run up against rules. There's the Five Pillars of Islam, there's the 10 Commandments, there's the Sermon on the Mount. Sikhism has a long list of rules or things you're supposed to do, Buddhists have principles. I mean, everybody kind of has this list of things.

I grew up Baptist, and we had our set of rules. The Presbyterians had their set of rules [they got to drink, we didn't]. The Methodists... we didn't think they had enough rules, honestly... they had a little bit too much fun! Catholics, that was a whole kind of different thing. But again, because we didn't get to make the rules, we find ourselves kinda pushing back on them, right? Anyone experience that?

SO, the question I want to ask today is:

What's with all the rules?

I mean, why is that such a big part of religion? Let's be honest, it's what we rebel against, it's part of why you left your childhood faith. It's why you decided not to go back to church, or mass, or temple or whatever. Part of it was just the rules, they were so difficult, it just didn't seem to work with the real world.

So, let's talk about that today. Is there a beginning point for our understanding of rules and a God, who we believe somehow cares about us, created the world, and loves us. So, let's begin with this premise, and maybe this is something you haven't thought about before, but:

Rules always assume a relationship.

Wherever you have rules, there is some kind of relationship. Wherever you find yourself accountable to a set of rules, in any sphere or walk of life, wherever you are accountable to a set of rules, you are in some kind of relationship.

Here's what I mean. Think about these different relational models for rules. For example, there is the:

Family

In the family model, you were born into a family and then at about the age of 6-9 months your parents started making rules, right? They didn't make rules to **MAKE** you a part of the family; you were already part of the family; they made rules because you **WERE** a part of the family. They established rules when you were a kid, and then eventually you outgrew the rules, but you were still a part of the family. Does that make sense? In the family model you don't have rules to make you a part of the family, you have rules because you are already a part of the family.

And the interesting thing about the whole parents making rules thing is parents only set rules for their own kids, right? We have all met kids from other families that we would like to set rules for, but you've never called your neighbor and said, "Hey, I want to talk to your daughter, put her on." "Hello!" "Hey, what time did you come in last night, I saw you sneaking in 30 minutes after curfew, you know the rules young lady..." You don't do that (unless you are a creeper) why? Because she is not your kid!

So, this is really important. From a family standpoint, rules are for family members only. Parents set rules for their own kids! The rules don't make you part of the family, the rules are because you *ARE* part of the family. Does that make sense?

Now think about a different relational environment, what about the:

Club

Think about rules in a club. In a club (exercise club, golf club, boating club, civic club) in a club you agree to keep certain rules in order to get in or keep the relationship. So, when you join a club they give you a contract, you read it and if you agree, you sign it. Once you sign it, you are agreeing to keep these rules in exchange for the right to be in a relationship with this club. And if you break the rules, you get punished or kicked out. How many of you have ever joined a club of some kind? You've experienced this then.

They say, "Here's how we do it here, here's what we expect of you..." You sign some sort of contract agreeing to the rules and that's how you get in. But it's different. In a family, you get the rules after the relationship is established; but in the club model, you actually get the rules in order to establish the relationship. It's different.

Just for fun, let's talk about a third category. This is called the:

Homeowners association

In the HOA model, you don't always know where you stand. You're free to buy the house and get in and as long as you obey the neighborhood rules (whatever those are because no one reads them) everybody's fine. But then you get busy and don't have time to pressure wash your driveway and you start getting threatening letters in your mailbox, right? Do you ever get those? With an HOA you're kinda in and kinda out. They can't actually make you move; they can't throw you out of the neighborhood, but they can put a lien on your house and threaten or bully you.

The point is, wherever you find yourself accountable to a set of rules, you are in some kind of relationship. Rules and relationships are connected, these two things go together.

BUT if you take these rule / relationship models and you transpose them over here to religion, you can see why this is so confusing. Because which one is it? Is it you're in with God and no matter what you do, you're in, but you have rules to live by because your family? Or is it, "Hey, if you behave, you get in, but you gotta keep behaving or I'm gonna kick you out of the club?" Or is it, "Well, we can't really keep anyone out, we can't really kick anyone out, but if you don't follow the rules we are going to make your life miserable. I'm gonna guilt you to death and shame you to death. I will never be fully happy with you, but I will put up with you for a few years on this planet." Which one is it?

AND I would be willing to bet that when I started throwing all those categories out, some of you began to think theologically or philosophically but for others, you begin to think emotionally. Because as we kinda sort through this, "Is there a God, is there a personal God, how does all this work..." there's such an emotional component to this. Right? Because some of you were taught it's like a family, but you feel like you have experienced a club. Some of you were taught and kept in line believing it was a club, but now you think it's all more of an association because we're one human race and all that. So, which one is it and how do we know?

And regardless, if you embrace Christianity or not, at some point along the way, you're gonna wrestle with, "How does my behavior line up, what does God expect of me, when am I in, and when am I out, and how the heck am I supposed to know?"

So, to help us begin to figure this out, I want us to go all the way back to one of the oldest sets of laws ever documented. It's not quite the oldest we have uncovered, but it is the most well-documented because it found its way into Jewish literature, Christian literature, and even Islamic literature, believe it or not. It is known as the:

Ten Commandments (1446 BC)

Around 1446 BC, the Ten Commandments show up in written form on the planet. Christians, Jews, and Muslims all believe that they were given to Moses by God on top of Mt. Sinai, you'll have to figure out if you believe that or not.

Just out of curiosity, there is no shame in your game here, does anyone know what book of the Bible you might find the 10 Commandments? Exodus! We also would have accepted Deuteronomy, so the next time it comes up you will know. Everyone repeat after me... Exodus... 20... Now, before we look at them in where... Before we look at them, if you weren't here last week, I want to tie all this together because last week, we talked about ABRAHAM.

{CHART}

Abraham's huge in many of the oldest world religions. Abraham was promised by God that he was going to be a nation. The problem was Abraham didn't have any children and he was old. His wife Sarah was way too old, so they panicked. His wife Sarah says, "I can't have children, but my handmaiden can. So maybe you can whatever with her, I don't know..." So, Abraham being the upstanding hero that he was said, "Really, cool... I mean are you sure honey bear?" So, he does, and they do. His name is ISHMAEL. Later on, God keeps his promise and Sarah actually gets pregnant too. She has a son named ISAAC. So, now Abraham has two sons with two different women.

A little history for you. In Islam, Ishmael is considered the son of blessing. In Judaism and Christianity, Isaac is considered the son of blessing. So, these world religions go in two different directions. BUT what we know about Ishmael actually was taught about 600 years *after* Jesus, by the Prophet Mohammad. Mohammad reaches back into history and sort of weaves this narrative that connected the Arab nations back to Ishmael, back to Abraham.

The Biblical narrative on the other hand actually continues straight from Isaac to his son JACOB. Jacob had 12 SONS that eventually became the 12 tribes of ISRAEL. One of these sons was named Joseph. Joseph's brothers hate him and sell him into slavery in Egypt. But Joseph actually ends up becoming the prime minister during a severe famine. Joseph's brothers come looking for food, all is forgiven, the family is reunited, and they go to live with him in Egypt. And this family becomes a nation in Egypt. They are multiplying like rabbits and the people come to Pharaoh and say, "Hey, if we don't do something about these Hebrews, there's gonna be more Hebrews than Egyptians." So, they enslaved them. And, for 400 years, generation after generation after generation, all they know is slavery.

And then, out of the blue one day, a man shows up, named Moses. And he goes to Pharaoh and says... "Let my people go." And Pharaoh says, "No, don't think so." Eventually due to a number of plagues and outbreaks Pharaoh relents and Moses leads the nation of Israel out of Egypt towards the land promised by God to Abraham hundreds of years before.

This is history, scholar's debate on the number of people, but we know this mass migration out of Egypt actually happened. Moses leads the people out and about three weeks later, they end up at Mount Sinai. And according to the story, Moses goes up on the mountain and God gives this nation their first set of laws. And part of it is what we know as the Ten Commandments and you can find those in... Exodus 20.

What I want us to look at today is the prelude, or the introduction to the 10 Commandments. Because in these two verses, we get a major clue or insight into how God and rules and relationship all fit together. Here's how it begins in... right!

¹ And God spoke all these words: ² "I am the LORD *your* God,

And Moses might have said, really? "Yes, I'm the Lord, *YOUR* God." Well, that would make us like your people??? "Correct!" Well, how did that happen? When did that happen? I mean, we haven't even done anything. We've been in slavery for 400 years, You drag us out through all these miracles and now, suddenly, you are God and we're your people? How did that happen?

God says I am the Lord, your God and He continues:

who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

I know this doesn't seem huge, but this is huge as we kind of piece all of this together. "I am the Lord, your God who has done something for you, and you have done nothing for me. I'm the Lord, your God who sent a deliverer into your darkest hour when you had given up hope. When Abraham was a fairytale you told your children, so they won't lose hope. When nobody expected it, I sent a deliverer, and I dragged you out of Egypt, and you haven't done a thing. So, before I give you the rules for how this relationship is going to work, I just want you to know, you're mine, and I am yours. Let's establish that before we talk about rules."

BUT a really interesting thing happened back in Egypt. Right before the final plague, God gave the people a message through Moses. God says I have one thing I want you all to do. Remember, there are no commandments yet, no law, no relationship, before all that, back in Egypt God asked the people to:

Trust Me

God's message was simply trust me. He said—and we got deep into this the Sunday before Easter—but God said, "Tonight before you go to bed, I want you to slaughter a lamb and I want you to have a meal, but I want you to take the blood of this lamb and I want you to put it over your door and down the sides of your door." That's really freaky, why would we do that? God says, "Trust me." And so, that night, the majority of the Jewish people had a special meal, they slaughtered a lamb, and they took the blood of that lamb and they put it over their doors, and they put it down the sides of their doors. And then they packed everything they had because they were told the next day they would be leaving. "Really? We've been here for 400 years and we're leaving tomorrow?" "Trust me," God said. That night the angel of death went throughout Egypt, but it passed over every household covered by the blood of the lamb. The next morning after death visited Pharaoh's home in the night said, "Go and take everything, get out of here, just leave!"

And from that moment on, the Jewish people would celebrate the Passover Festival to remember, not the Ten Commandments, not the law of God, but to remember this night, when God whispered to the nation, "I just want you to trust me, and in trusting me, you will find your deliverance."

SO, now three weeks later, they're gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. God says, "Now I'm going to give you some rules, but let's make sure we don't forget the most important thing. I am the Lord, your God, you are my people, I'm the one who delivered you from slavery. Now, there's some things I want you to do as we learn to live together." And then God gave them their first commandment:

³ "You shall have no other gods before me."

Ahhh, that's it? Well, you can put a check in that box! Of course, we wouldn't have any other God before you. Who can compete with a God who wrecked the economy of Egypt, embarrassed Pharaoh, and delivered us from 400 years of slavery? You got it, You are our God! Numero uno. Right!

I mean put yourself in their sandals, wouldn't you think that is a bit silly? But here's something to think about as we wrestle with rules and their relationship to God:

The Ten Commandments were confirmation of, not a condition of Israel's relationship with God.

The Ten Commandments were a confirmation, not a condition, of their relationship with God. It wasn't a condition like, "OK I'm giving you 10 things and if you do these things you can be my people. If you mess up five out of the ten, you're out, four, still out, we can talk about three out of ten." That wasn't it, these weren't conditions.

Remember, this is 1500 years before Jesus, this is 2100 years before the Mohammad, this is as far back as we can go and connect rules and God. And what do we see, it was confirmation of a relationship, not conditions for one. It's the family model, not the club model. God says I chose you to be my people, and before I ever gave you the first "thou" or "thou shall not" I just want to remind you:

The relationship precedes the rules.

These rules are confirmation of our relationship, not a condition for it. God chose the family model over the club model or any other model. That's how God treated the nation of Israel.

The question is, is that how He treats you? Is that how He treats me today? AND what we are going to see over the next few weeks is, through Jesus, again not asking you believe anything about Him yet, but through Jesus you will come to this conclusion:

The rules are confirmation of, not a condition of a relationship with God.

In terms of the role of rules, the rules are confirmation not a condition of a relationship with God. That God is like a parent, He only gives rules to people who are His kids, who are already in relationship with Him.

Now, if that's true, regardless of where you land in terms of belief by the end of this journey, if that's true, that's dramatically different from what most of us grew up believing.

If God's relationship with the nation of Israel is a model that you can rebel and be disobedient (if you have ever read the Old Testament prophets this why they seem to be saying the same thing over again, this is God going one, two, three... OK I'm putting you in time out) but if this is a model that we can go too far, and do your own thing, but God keeps coming back over and over and over and disciplining, disciplining not to pay you back, but to bring you back like a good parent, that's astounding. That says something about the expansive and amazing depth of God's love, and God's mercy, and God's kindness. That's different!

BUT let's not get a head of ourselves. Because I know there are some of you right now talking in your heads going, well, but:

What if God plays favorites?

What if God just liked Abraham? What if God was bored and needed to do something so He just picked a people. "Ahhh... I pick you Israel... I'm gonna let you be my people. But these Americans, I don't know. You guys do the best you can, I will let you know how it works out. You're gonna have to work your way in and you'll never really know if you are in, because I'm not gonna make the standard clear enough for you to know whether or not you are in. You will never know if I grade on a curve. You'll just have to spend your whole life being the best that you can and then, on judgment day, you will find out where you stood with Me." What if God played favorites? What if Abraham and the nation of Israel were just His favorites? For the rest of us it's like, "Be good and then in the end I will tell you if you were good enough."

So, let's wrestle with that. If you were not here last week, we looked at the promise God made to Abraham. And if you read that whole thing all the way through, AND if you read through the promise God makes with Israel that we just looked at, it becomes pretty clear that this wasn't just about Abraham and this wasn't just about one nation. This was about all of God's creation!

Here's why I say that, remember God's promise to Abraham from last week: (Gen 18:18)

For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and ALL the nations of the earth will BE BLESSED through him.

God said, "ALL the nations of the earth will be blessed through you." Not just the nation that you will become one day, but this is for all the nations of the earth.

Hundreds of years later the Prophet Isaiah would come along and say to the nation of Israel, listen to this: (Isaiah 49:6)

I will also make you [Israel] a light for the Gentiles, [that's us] that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

In other words, it's not just about one nation Israel, you are going to be like a sign, you're going to be like a bright shining light in the darkness for the rest of the world. As much as I love you, as much as I've chosen you, it's bigger than just you.

And so, we shouldn't be completely surprised when about 1,500 years later, 1,500 years after the 10 Commandments, Jesus walks on to the world stage and what does He do? Before He demands anything, before He requires anything, before He ever gives a single rule He said, "Trust Me, trust Me. Just come follow Me."

As it began through faith with Abraham, as it continued through faith with the nation of Israel, why would be surprised then that this message for the whole world would be the exact same thing. Jesus said just trust Me.

So, John, the disciple who knew Jesus best, wrote this as he looked back on his time with Jesus: (John 1)

¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who [behaved? No...] believed in his name, he gave the right to become [club members? What...] children of God.

Jesus came for the rest of the world; He came with the invitation to become a child of God! And just like with Abraham and Israel before, this relationship begins by faith, by trust. Jesus has invited the rest of us to become children of God by trusting Him.

Which means when it comes to the rules, it's the exact same model, it's the family model, through faith. Which means whenever you read something where Jesus is requiring something from you, remember,

remember, it is evidence of His love for you! It's evidence of the fact that you have a pre-established relationship! You are a His child! He only gives rules to people who are His kids, who are already in relationship with Him! These rules are confirmation of our relationship, not a condition for it! God chose the family model over the club model.

Now, I have a question for you, we will pick things up right here next Sunday, but each week I have been giving you a question to wrestle with over lunch or with a friend. Here's the question, I would love for you to answer out loud with someone else before next week:

Growing up, did you feel like [this is important, I don't want this to be a theological discussion, be honest, did it feel like] **religion was based on the:**

• **Family model**

• **Club model**

• **HOA model**

When you think about how you were raised and what you were taught and how you felt in your relationship with God when you'd lay in bed at night, did you feel like God had adopted you into His family? Like, you're in, sure there are some family rules, but you can never be thrown out, you are part of His forever family. Or did it feel more like, "Hey, if you keep your end of the deal, I'll keep my end of the deal." It felt like a club with a contract. Or did it feel like you just never knew. Maybe God wasn't gonna throw you out, but He didn't like you very much?

I want you to wrestle that question to the ground and I want you to do everything you can to not miss next Sunday. Let me pray for you.

[PRAYER TIME]