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**RULES**







# NO PARKING

## SECTION ONE: RELATIONSHIPS AND RULES

If you were raised in a religious home or attended a religious school, it was probably the rules that made you question whether religion had a place in your future. Perhaps the rules associated with the faith tradition you were raised in made you feel judged. A faith community may have even ostracized you. Truth is, most religious rules run contrary to human nature. And being the human that you are, that's a problem. Inconsistency in the way rules were applied and to whom they were applied may have left you with the impression that religion breeds hypocrisy. And, in fact, it does.

Religious people love loopholes. They look for loopholes in their faith systems to avoid the more restrictive rules. So, many Catholics have found ways to justify the use of birth control. Only a percentage of

Muslims pray with their faces to the ground five times a day. Just a small number of Protestants show the type of kindness, love, and forgiveness that Jesus modeled. Religious people are generally better at *believing* than *behaving*. Every major faith tradition teaches some form of the Golden Rule: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. But we're all guilty of excusing our way around that imperative. So, yes, religion seems to breed hypocrisy. At some level, we are all hypocrites.

In spite of that, all faith systems agree that in order to be in good standing, followers need to keep the rules. Belief and behaviour are central in every major religion. Obedience determines whether you are a good Muslim, Christian, Sikh, or Jew. Whether it's the Five Pillars of Islam, the Ten Commandments of ancient Judaism, or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, rules define proper and improper behaviour within a faith system.

**Submission is not about authority and it is not obedience; it is all about relationships of love and respect.**

William Paul Young

But here's something you may not have considered: *Rules always assume a relationship*. If you are a parent, you set rules for your kids. Imagine getting a call from a neighbor checking to see if your kids are in bed. None of her business, right? She can't set rules for your kids. They are your kids. An individual's children are his or her children before the

creation of rules. In fact, an individual's children are his or her children even if there aren't any rules. Relationship precedes the rules in a *family model*.

Family isn't the only model. In some cases, one's willingness to adopt or agree to a set of rules creates the relationship. In this scenario, the rules precede the relationship. Think of this as the *club model*. When you join a health club, hunting club, or country club, you have to sign a contract agreeing to abide by the rules. Agreeing to the rules is how the relationship is established. In this arrangement, breaking the rules can result in the termination of a relationship.

But which of the above models reflects the connection between rules and relationship in religion? Is it the *family model*, where disobeying the rules will get you punished but not necessarily kicked out? Or is it more like the *club model*, where you have to agree to the rules to get in and if you don't keep the rules, you're asked to leave? How you answer this question will determine the way you view God and the way you assume he views you.

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**Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend.**

 Albert Camus





## SECTION ONE:

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 In general, how do you respond to rules? Do you tend to keep them or break them?
- 2 What were the most important rules for you growing up? Which rules are still important to you?
- 3 Which model, family or club, best represents your understanding or experience of rules and relationship in religion?

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**Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws.**

 Plato





## SECTION TWO: GOD'S RULES

The Ten Commandments is arguably the most famous list of rules ever produced. Just about everyone in Western civilization is familiar with the Ten Commandments. But very few people can name them.

The Ten Commandments were given to ancient Israel about fifteen hundred years before Jesus was born and about twenty-one hundred years before the birth of Muhammad. The most significant thing about the Ten Commandments is not the commandments themselves. In many ways, they are quite ordinary. They prohibit adultery, murder, and theft. Nothing too surprising. What makes them important for our purposes is *to whom* they were given, *why* they were given, and *when* they were given.

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**We may not all break the Ten Commandments, but we are certainly all capable of it. Within us lurks the breaker of all laws, ready to spring out at the first real opportunity.**

 Isadora Duncan

In Part 3, we discussed how God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a nation and that the nation would bless the world. Eventually, Abraham and Sarah had a son, Isaac. Isaac had Jacob. Jacob had twelve sons, whose families became large tribes, who became known collectively as the Hebrew people. In order to escape a devastating famine, Jacob's sons and their families migrated to Egypt, where they lived for many years. Eventually, these Hebrews were enslaved by a Pharaoh. For four hundred years, the descendants of Abraham labored under the harsh and cruel treatment of Egyptian taskmasters. Then, around 1446 BC, Moses led what by this time had become the nation of Israel out of Egypt and back to the land of Abraham. It was during their journey back home that God gave Israel the rules.

The Ten Commandments are found in the Old Testament book of Exodus. If the term *exodus* reminds you of the English term *exit*, it should. This ancient document is the story of Israel's *exit* out of Egyptian slavery. About three months after they were delivered from their oppressors, the nation camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses ascended the mountain and stayed there for over a month. When he returned, he brought with him God's law for Israel.



The sequence of events is important. It provides us with a valuable insight into the connection between God's rules *for* the nation and his relationship *with* the nation. Which came first, the relationship or the rules? Was one predicated on the other? If the answer to that question is not clear from the sequence of events, it is certainly clear based on what we find in the commandments themselves.

Most people are surprised to discover that the Ten Commandments do not begin with a command. Here's the opening line:

And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God." - Exodus 20:1-2

God declared his relationship with the nation before telling the nation what he required. God gave Israel rules because they belonged to him. He was their God and they were his people. The Ten Commandments were confirmation of, not a condition of, Israel's relationship with God. The second part of the statement underscores this:

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." - Exodus 20:2

In other words, *I am the Lord your God who did something significant for you without requiring anything from you*. Three months earlier, they were a nation with no hope and no future. Now they were free. And they had done nothing to deserve it. After defining and affirming their relationship, God issued his first command:

"You shall have no other gods before me." - Exodus 20:3

After proving himself trustworthy to the nation, God asked the nation to trust him in return—to look to him as their ultimate authority and provider. God did not give Israel rules as a means by which to establish a relationship. From the very beginning, God adopted the *family model*. The people of Israel were his children. He was their Father.







- 1 What value do the Ten Commandments have today?
- 2 Have you considered that God declared a relationship with the people of Israel before giving the Ten Commandments? What do you think of this?
- 3 What rules do you think matter most to God?

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting practice. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

**Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of real liberty**

 Henry M. Robert



## SECTION THREE: YOUR ROLE

God loved Abraham. God loved Israel. But wouldn't it be presumptuous for you to assume God feels the same way about you? Relationship preceded rules with Abraham and Israel, but maybe God plays favourites. Perhaps for everyone else God opted for the *club model*—the “behave, or else” model.

God's ultimate purpose in choosing Abraham through which to create a nation was actually to bless the entire world. In fact, part of God's promise to Abraham was that the entire world would be blessed through him. Later, the prophet Isaiah would echo that idea when he wrote concerning Israel:

“I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” - Isaiah 49:6

God's plan, beginning with Abraham, always included all the nations of the earth. His plan included you! So, we should not be surprised to discover that when Jesus appeared fifteen hundred years later, he would extend God's offer of salvation beyond the borders of Israel. One of his closest followers, the apostle John, stated Jesus' intent this way:

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. - John 1:12

Did you catch those last three words? “Children of God.” Not “members of the club.” Children.

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**An infinite God can give all of Himself to each of His children. He does not distribute Himself that each may have a part, but to each one He gives all of Himself as fully as if there were no others.**

● A. W. Tozer

There is no more compelling motivation to worthwhile endeavour than the knowledge that we are children of God, that God expects us to do something with our lives, and that He will give us help when help is sought.

 Gordon B. Hinckley

SECTION THREE:  
QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 Is there a connection between the way God accepted Abraham, accepted Israel, and accepts us? Explain.
- 2 Is it easier to see God as a rule maker or a parent with boundaries? Why?
- 3 What would change if you really saw yourself as a *child* of God?

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God reveals himself to us not in a metaphysical formulation or a cosmic fireworks display but in the kind of stories that we use to tell our children who they are and how to grow up as human beings.

Eugene Peterson



## BOTTOM LINES FOR PART 4

- Rules always assume a relationship.
- God's rules didn't establish his relationship with Israel; they were confirmation of his relationship with Israel.
- God's plan, beginning with Abraham, always included us.

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**It is after you have realised that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power - it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk.**

 C. S. Lewis

