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EXODUS 20:1-20  
MATT. 21:33-END

### WHAT'S THE POINT IN THE 10 COMMANDMENTS?

The Ten commandments form a set of rules that are thousands of years old. Why bother with them now? There are two big problems with getting people to believe they really matter, two big questions to ask: '**what's the point?**' and '*who's the point?*'

### WHAT'S THE POINT?

We live in a society where people don't like to be told what to do. The emphasis is on personal choice and free will. And let's be honest with ourselves- we do it as well. It's not just teenagers (or children who are practising to be teenagers) who know their rights. We can all be obsessed with how we think we ought to be treated.

*'It's my life'* we often hear. Whether it's around decisions over what food to eat,, getting the treatment *I* want for my illness, choosing the school for my children or the right to die or the right to have an abortion,....we think we have rights and we should have a certain amount of freedom for ourselves.

In.....people put together a 'Children's Charter'. They suggested some 'Rights' that children across the world should have. They were different to the kinds of rights we think we ought to have. They include things like a right to life and care, freedom from abuse, a right to education, a right to freedom from slave labour.....The things that truly enhance life.

We like to be able to choose. So shouldn't we re-name the 10 commandments 'the 10 suggestions'? So it might go this way: *'It would be a good idea to take some time off each week to think about God and enjoy the world around you-but if you want to go shopping, fit in some work and end up exhausted and unable to enjoy your family, it's up to you.'* Or *'It would be a good thing not to murder anyone but if they really wind you up so much that you get out of control, then it will really be their fault if you lash out so don't let it worry you.'* ' Bear in mind that your parents did bring you into this world but if they annoyed you when you were young and

*as they were born in another era you don't have pay them much attention now if you don't feel like it'*

We can joke but you can see the point. Why should anyone tell me what to do?

What's the point in the Ten *Commandments*? There are two good reasons for keeping 'commandments' not 'suggestions'.

1. human nature is the same now as it was then. People still have idols which drive their lives and help make the priorities unbalanced—work, money, materialism, even family; people still have too little rest; we still don't respect older folk for their experience and wisdom and treat them with dignity; we still want to kill or help others to violence; we still ruin relationships with unfaithfulness, we still take what's not ours ; we still tell untruths that damage reputations and we still want what other people have got instead of being happy with what we have got ourselves.
2. Whilst it's a really good thing to encourage thinking for ourselves, valuing freedom and learning independence, sometimes that means we don't have clear guidelines about how to live with each other. Whatever feels OK to me must be right- except that sometimes it doesn't work out well and I don't know what to do. It's a kind of freedom, for sure, but sometimes it's so much about doing what I want that I don't know what it is that I want to start with. [The Children's Charter is a charter based on good things for community living together.]

### WHO'S THE POINT?

If the problem is that we don't like being told what to do, we can usually respond better if we know the one who is telling us and what they're really like. If we can respect someone, we may well do as they want.

So here's the key to it all. *'God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods but me.'* (20:1-3)

This is the God who rescued the Israelites from Egypt where they had no life worth living at all. This is the God who can bring water out of a rock, manna from the ground, quails from the sky; who can lead people with fire and cloud so they know where to go; the God who helped them defeat the first enemies they met just before they reached mount Sinai; the God who is so powerful that they can't treat him casually- the mountain smokes and trembles and it turns dark. He's a God who demands respect and obedience but he's also a God who says (*ch. 19:4*) *You have seen how I carried you on eagles wings and brought you to myself...if you obey me fully and keep y covenant then you will be my treasured possession'*

*Obey me, yes. But remember how I've rescued you and carried you and know how much I will treasure you and keep you safe as well. Doesn't that make it worthwhile? The Narnia stories by CS Lewis talk about Aslan the lion as a picture of God. They say that by no means can Aslan the lion be considered safe but he is very, very good.*

This isn't just about rules for the sake of rules. They're rules to help build a community, with a loving God at the head. They can't manage without him. [even in chapter 18 Moses has been so exhausted working out disputes and judging and giving advice that he's had to have some help delegating].

So you see it's not just rules, it's relationship. It's not about a puffed up god who wants all the glory for his own sake. This is about the love and care of God and the love and care of one another. So the first 4 commands relate particularly to God and the rest to our neighbours. Of course he says don't worship anyone else but me – because he's the only one who can give you what you really need.

In Deuteronomy 5 and 6 we get the statement of the commands again but they're followed by statements of why it's good to follow – *'it will go well with you...you will increase in a good land(Deut. 6:3) 'if we're careful to obey...it will be our righteousness (6:25) and it's all summed up this way: 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments are to be on your hearts...'* (6:4)

When Jesus is asked, all those years later, which is the greatest commandment, what does he choose? *'Love the Lord your God.....and love your neighbour'(Mt. 22:37)*

Not just Rules but Relationships and Love. These rules are NOT about restrictions to our freedom. They are about ways to discover loving relationships. Stay faithful and it will help your marriage; tell the truth and people may like you more and believe you more; take rest and you will have more energy for work and appreciate your world better; concentrate on putting God in first place and you may be less unhappy when other things don't satisfy like you thought they would.

**What's the point in the Ten Commandments?** Human nature is the same as it ever was. Without rules we flounder about not always knowing how to live or where to go.

**Who's the point in the Ten Commandments?** God and his people. This is not just about rules but relationships: with a God who keeps us as treasured possessions, who lived in Jesus to show that love again through living and dying and rising again and with the people around us.

#### **A CAUTION**

Some of you will be committed to the ideal of the ten commandments and need no convincing that they're important. But all of us need convincing that we break them. Jesus was quick to say that those who thought they'd never committed adultery needed to consider if they'd looked lustfully at someone; he said that you may not have committed murder but you might have called someone an idiot. Our thoughts and attitudes, our lack of respect is where it can all begin. You have never stolen possessions? What about stealing the good name of someone you gossiped about? You don't covet? What about that resentment about the good things that have happened to someone else in your life whilst your position is much harder?

We all break the rules. We can't lessen the force of the 10 commandments. Which is very depressing! Thank God that we have the mercy of Jesus who still loves, forgive and treasures all those who trust him to keep on carrying us as long as we turn to him for a way ahead.