

Why We Should Listen to God

If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor in training here. It's great to see all of you. If you have a bible, go ahead and open up to Deuteronomy. We'll spend most of our time in chapter 6.

I don't know about you, but personally, I have a really hard time with rules I have to abide by when I don't know the reason behind them. I don't have an issue with rules in general, but I feel like I almost have a compulsion inside me to ask "why?" to rules around me, especially when it's a rule I don't like in the first place.

And at the core of it, I want to know the reasons behind the rules I have to live by because I want to be the one to judge whether or not I think it's worth following. Because my assumption is if I don't *like* whatever rule is in place, I need to hear a pretty convincing case as to why I should even *consider* following said rule. And I've seen this play out all sorts of ways in my life ever since I was a kid.

So I used to work for the Y here in town for a few years. They, like pretty much all organizations, have an employee handbook that outlines the dos and don'ts for staff within their organization. And my personal tendency in any organization is to turn straight to the section on "appearance and dress code." I don't know when it started for me, but I decided pretty early on *that* would be the hill I decided to die on, no matter where I was. The first thing that caught my eye in the handbook was that any and all employees were allowed to have tattoos showing (that's good), piercings in their ears (also great for me), but *no other facial piercings*. And that really got me thinking. So I decided to build a case for why I thought I *should* be allowed to have my nose pierced and I marched over to HR with all my notes.

I asked why it was a rule and they said it was a matter of image being portrayed. Something about a facial piercing giving the "wrong" kind of image. So I made the case that the image being portrayed by someone having full tattoo sleeves wasn't all that different at its core to the image of a nose ring. And you know what they said? They *agreed*. They changed the rule! I was ecstatic. Not just with the new policy, but with my newfound power to change all the rules I thought were silly. So I found another one. This one said employees outside of aquatics weren't allowed to wear open-toe shoes. So I marched back over to HR and asked the same question, "why is *this* a rule?" And I fully expected another reason I thought was silly and I was ready to point out just how ridiculous it was.

But instead, I was told that a few years back, an employee was wearing sandals and a shelving unit fell over at work and landed on their foot and badly broke it in several places. And apparently the insurance company said because the employee didn't take any protective measures (such as close-toe shoes), they would not be eligible for worker's compensation. So *now*, there's a rule that employees need close-toe shoes so they can actually be protected financially in the event of an accident. And boy oh boy did my tone change. I came in guns blazing and left feeling pretty humbled. Instead of trying to make a case for why I should get to wear Chacos at work, that actually sounded like a pretty *great* reason for that rule.

And I think there's at least some of that mentality in most of us. Most of us, whenever we hear a rule, especially a seemingly *random* one, inherently want to question it. Anyone here who has spent any time at all around children—or has *been* one, which is just about all of us—knows this all too well. They ask questions *constantly*. But I don't think it stops once people start to get older. In fact, I think we ask it *more* as life goes on. Or we at least start asking it when it comes to bigger and bigger concepts. Or we just ask using more complicated words to help us feel smarter while we're asking the exact same questions.

While a toddler may ask the question 1,000 times in an hour about every word that comes out of your mouth, at some point in life I think everyone gets to a point where we ask “why” when it comes to the question of morality, or good and evil. We want to know who gets to decide what is and isn't okay, and we want to know *why* they get to be the ones to do so. And what we're doing in this series is taking time to walk through the Ten Commandments. Ten instructions God handed down to his people through Moses in the Old Testament. We want to try to dig deeper into those as we go along, but today I want to at least attempt to answer the question, “why?”

We know God gave these instructions, and several others throughout the Bible, but people throughout history since these instructions were handed down have asked, “*why* should we listen to God?” Why should we trust God in the first place? Not only why, but *can* we trust God? And coincidentally (or providentially), Scripture actually asks and answers that very question.

Brief history lesson for you: the Ten Commandments were given to God's people in the wilderness at the beginning of the exodus, or escape, from Egypt, hence the name of the book that talks about it. The Israelites then ended up wandering the desert for 40 years before going to the land that was promised to them. The beginning of the book of Deuteronomy is 40 years later when they are just outside the promised land, and Moses is giving a recap to the Israelites. Deuteronomy literally means “second law.” It's a

retelling of the laws given 40 years earlier. So in Deuteronomy 5, Moses goes back over all ten.

And at least part of the reason this is happening is because the Israelites didn't seem to want to listen to God in the first place. That's why they ended up wandering in the desert for 40 years instead of going straight into the land God promised to them. They were far too concerned with their own plans and their own ideas and weren't all that interested in listening to what God had to say. They were doubting God's authority and God's power, and instead of listening to him, they rejected him.

And I think we often find ourselves in a really similar situation. We've got all sorts of questions about God's commands. We want God to prove to us that we should listen to what he has to say, and the baseline assumption a lot of the time is that we probably know what is and isn't best for us. So instead of listening to God, we essentially demand an explanation. And people have been asking these questions and thinking about God's commands like this *forever*. We actually see God anticipate this human response. Go ahead and look at Deuteronomy chapter 6 and start at verse 20: "In the future, when [not if, but when] your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?"

God anticipates that people will have questions. He said, "*when* your son asks", then he actually gives a pretty clear answer. He doesn't have to do that. He's God. He could respond to the question with another question along the lines of, "do you have any idea who I am?" Sometimes in the bible, that *is* kind of how God responds. But not here. Instead, he anticipates the question, and he responds with compassion. He deems it worthy of answering. He actually gives us 4 answers as to why we should trust him in his commands to us. And I want to spend the majority of our time today looking at the 4 answers we're given. The first answer we get to the question "why should we listen to God?" is...

God saved us

Take a look at verses 21-22: "[when your son asks] tell him: We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent signs and wonders—great and terrible—on Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household." The very first reason we see is the fact that God sent Moses to set his people, the Israelites, free from slavery in Egypt. They had been slaves as a people for over 400 years, and God "brought [them] out of Egypt with a mighty hand." And it wasn't subtle. None of the Israelites were confused as to what happened or how they got out. Moses just said God did all these things "*before our eyes*."

God saved the Israelites from slavery, then he handed down the commandments. Which is incredibly important for us to realize. God did not give the law to his people while they were in captivity. God set them free *first*. God went out of his way to bring his people out of slavery *first*. God showed his love to his people by offering them redemption, *then* he gave instruction on living as redeemed people.

I think a lot of people today think about God's commands as a list of rules to follow in order to be seen as "good" or at least "good enough." There's this mentality, even among many people who have been around church, that trying to follow God's instructions is a means to earn his acceptance. "If I follow all these rules, surely God will accept me," or, "I have to follow all these rules in order for God to accept me."

But if we look at how God interacted with his people in the Old Testament, his commands came as a *response* to his acceptance. **It's not instructions on how to be saved, it's guidance on how to live as a saved people.** The Israelites were saved from their slavery *first*. God doesn't stand idly by while his people are enslaved. He stepped in, saved *them*, and he saved us. That's the first reason we're given as to why we should trust God: because he *saved* us. The second reason is...

God is wiser than us

Keep reading in verse 23: **But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors.** Let me show you how I got this conclusion. If you aren't familiar with the story or just need a recap, the Israelites didn't exactly start celebrating God's faithfulness as soon as they left Egypt. Like I mentioned earlier, it was quite the opposite.

As *soon* as the Israelites were free and clear of their oppressors, they started to complain. And not just regular road trip complaining. Almost immediately they started saying they would have been better off staying in Egypt, and they were *certain* God was trying to kill them. Basically they were convinced God brought them out of Egypt just to watch them all die in the desert. *Immediately* after God went through all the things he did to set them free, they turned around and accused God of not having a clue what he was doing. They assume he doesn't care about them.

Even though he just saved them from slavery and said he was taking them to a beautiful land he promised them, they started freaking out. Even though he was miraculously providing food every day in the form of manna from Heaven, they were convinced he didn't care about them because they would prefer to eat something else. **It's like the**

ancient Israelite version of a kid whose family is going on a trip to Disney World for the first time ever, and the second they get in the car, they start whining about how the snacks are all wrong, the trip is it's taking way too long, and they really just wish they were back at school during standardized testing week. "Kid, you don't have a clue how great things are about to be. You don't have the faintest idea how *worth it* this is."

They were *convinced* God had abandoned them right after they witnessed a series of miracles performed for the purpose of setting them free. But even in the midst of their complaining and their doubting, verse 23 shows us his plan all along. God knew what he was doing the whole time. God could see the whole picture even when the Israelites couldn't. God could see that they were in the desert, but he could *also* see that he was leading them to the promised land.

God's knowledge is so much bigger and broader than ours. He can see the whole picture. He knows exactly how all our actions and decisions will impact us. He knows all the effects of everything we do. He knows the whole story. And if he knows the whole story, he also knows what needs to happen to take us where he wants us to be. He knew the way to the promised land. Even when the Israelites were complaining and were convinced God was going to kill them all in the desert, God knew exactly what was coming and how to get his people through it. God is *so much wiser* than us and can see so much more.

Just like the kid who doesn't have the slightest clue what he's missing out on by complaining about not wanting to go to Disney World even though his parents are trying to tell him it's worth it. He just doesn't understand. The gap between the child's understanding and his parents' understanding is *massive*. And it pales in comparison to the gap between God's understanding and that of his people. God sees and knows and understands *so much more* than we ever could. The next reason we see to trust God is...

God is for our good always

Take a look at verse 24: "The LORD commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the LORD our God, **so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today.**" I actually really love the way the ESV translates this verse. It says, "*And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day.*" To me, this one feels a little more straightforward. It's said very plainly. God's desire is for his people to prosper. Now, we do need to be careful with this one because at times, people have taken this idea and gone a very different direction than Scripture. God does want his people to prosper, but

that doesn't mean God's definition of prosperity is the same as a 21st century American's definition.

We tend to think of prosperity as financial wealth or resources or comfort or whatever else feels nice to us. But God knows what is *actually* good for human life and for his people. And all of God's commands are meant to bring his people closer to that. God didn't set us free just to thrust us into a life of misery under his commands. God was for the good of his people when he set them free from slavery in Egypt, he was for the good of his people when he made a way to experience freedom from the bondage of sin, and he is for the good of his people in the commands that he gives because he knows they will ultimately help us move closer to the way he intended things to be before brokenness ever entered the picture.

God has a vision for how life should function for human flourishing and for the good of everyone. He has a plan for how to get to that place. God doesn't free us from slavery so he can then rob us of joy. If what Jesus did on the cross was to give us *life*, then his commands to us are also to give us life. God is not trying to take anything from you or withhold good from you. God is for our good *always*. And the last reason we're given in this passage for why we should listen to God is...

God's commands lead us to righteousness

Verse 25 says this: "And if we are careful to obey all this law before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, **that will be our righteousness.**" The word "righteousness" might not be something you think about often as a desirable thing in life. It might sound like something you'd hear from a televangelist or old school preacher or maybe you're like me and can only hear Crush, the turtle from Finding Nemo, saying everything is "righteous." But if you really boil it down, **righteousness is essentially the idea of being in right relationship with God, with others, with the world, and with yourself.**

A desire for righteousness is what we all have deep inside of us. The aching longing we feel in our souls is a desire for righteousness. A desire for things to be right, for things to be whole, for things to be like they were meant to be. God desires for things to move in that direction. God is for our good like I said, but not just for each of our *individual* good. God is for the good of his whole creation. God wants his world to exist in peace and he wants to see it flourish. He wants to see justice done consistently. He wants to see compassion and mercy be the norm. He wants there to be "righteousness."

And even in times when we may not see the whole picture or we may not understand it fully, God's commands exist to move things in that direction. God's commands help us

put his intentions and plans on display through the way we live in order to help move things towards reconciliation. There are even times when God's desire for restoration and "rightness" may not *personally* feel all that great. Americans tend to struggle with this a lot. In our hyper-individualistic culture, we hear things like "God is making things right" and "God is for our good always," and what we actually hear is, "God is making things better for me" and "God is for my personal benefit always." And that's not what Scripture is saying. **Not that things will *never* improve for you individually as a result of following God's commands, but God's plan for the good of his *people* as a whole doesn't necessarily include your personal convenience.**

Maybe I'd put it this way: God *loves* you. God loves you so much. For those of you here who don't really know what to make of any of the things we're talking about this morning, God loves you. For those of you who may be well on your way to deciding you think God is in fact *not* good, God loves you. For those of you who feel so utterly dead or empty inside and who feel like you don't have the energy to even begin to care about any of the things we're talking about, God loves you. If your mental health is so deep in the pits right now that you feel like you can't see straight, God loves you. If you're still trying to figure out if you think God can even *be* good with some of the things you've seen happen to people in your life or to you, God loves you. For those of you who have been deeply hurt by Christians in the past and your guard is up and you're afraid to be vulnerable, God loves you. If there are things in Scripture that God commands that you find hard to stomach or understand, God loves you.

God loves you. *And*, love is not undifferentiated approval. Love is not a synonym with "affirmation." Love is not a guarantee of a life of boundless pleasure. Here's how one philosopher put it:

"Love is not synonymous with undifferentiated approval of everything the beloved person thinks and does in real life...[nor is it] the wish for the beloved to feel good always in every situation and for him to be spared experiencing pain or grief in all circumstances. Mere 'kindness' which tolerates anything except suffering has nothing to do with real love. No lover can look on easily when he sees the one he loves preferring convenience to the good." - Josef Pieper

This is such a hard concept for many Americans, but it's so incredibly important for us to remember. When we say God loves us and is for our good always, we don't mean his intention is just for us to *feel* good always. The fact that God is for our good always does not mean he will always do everything he can to make it so we don't experience pain or grief. **God loves you so deeply as you are, *and* he loves you far too much to let you stay as you are.**

God wants righteousness for you, and his commands are meant to lead us in that direction. They are meant to lead us to a place of wholeness with God and with the rest of his creation. God's commands are meant to move us towards the way things we meant to be. That's his desire for all of us and it's the last reason we see given in this passage for why we should trust him.

God gave his commandments to his people in the Old Testament, the Israelites. And if you know much about the Old Testament, you know the Israelites never quite got the hang of being God's sons and daughters. They repeatedly disobeyed God and went against him and ended up in some pretty terrible situations as a result of their wandering away from him. They strayed often from righteousness and ran from God time after time. But even though Israel continually fell short of being God's son, God did eventually have a perfect son.

Jesus was one with God for eternity past, and eventually entered our world as a human to put on display what righteousness and obedience truly looked like. He was God in human form. And in the same way from the Old Testament, Jesus saved us. His work on the cross freed us from slavery to sin. [Romans 6:6](#) says it like this:

6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."

Jesus also is wiser than us. He knew he was ultimately going to the cross despite his followers trying to stop it. He knew what needed to be done despite how completely outlandish it sounds to say he needed to die for his enemies. No one does that. But Jesus knew the whole story when everyone around him couldn't see it. He was and is for our good always. He endured a brutal death and separation from God the Father for our sake. He offers us a life of hope instead of despair, a life of joy instead of sorrow, a life of freedom instead slavery to our sin as we pursue him. He is for our good.

And Jesus' life shows us *exactly* what righteousness looks like. He *perfectly* followed every single command. He was righteousness incarnate. And through Jesus' work on the cross, all of his perfect righteousness is laid over us. Jesus' righteousness stands in our place. And it's such a beautiful picture to look at how God communicates with his people back in Deuteronomy knowing exactly what will come through Jesus.

God tells his people there will be a time to come when your son asks you why they should even trust him at all, and he knows that a time is coming when he will give up his own son to answer that question once and for all. If God didn't even spare his own son in

order to be in right relationship with us, if he can be trusted to follow through on *that* promise, he can be trusted in every situation.

So here's how I want to land today: I know people in this room are likely all over the map when it comes to perception of and response to God's commands. But I want everyone to take time this week to think through what we've talked about today. I want us all to take a step back and look at God's commands through a new set of lenses. Instead of God's commands just being rules we don't necessarily understand, what if we approached them differently? What if we thought about God's commands in Scripture in light of the fact that he has saved us, that he is wiser than us, that he's for our good, and that he wants to lead us to righteousness? I think it's helpful to *stop* filtering God's commands through our own preferences and biases and *start* filtering it through these questions:

What could God be saving me from through this command? We've said this before, but I think it's worth repeating: when we say God saved us, it's not some esoteric or conceptual "saving." We mean God literally *saved* us from our sin. He rescued us. And it's a continual, ongoing process. God is ongoingly saving us from the snares of sin in our life. He is saving us from the effects of that sin. He is shaping us more and more to look less like our old self that was enslaved to sin and to look more and more like him.

Where might I be valuing my own wisdom over God's in this command? In what ways are we assuming that we have all the answers or the best judgement? In what ways are we approaching God's commands as if we want him to fit into whatever plans we've made instead of the other way around?

How might this command be for the good of God's people? If God is for the good of his people, then his commands will move us in that direction. So even, and especially, when our knee-jerk reaction is to think God's commands aren't in line with what we think is best for ourselves, how might that command actually be for the good of God's people and God's intention for his creation?

In what ways could I move towards right relationship with God, with others, or with myself through this command? How are we able to move in the direction of righteousness through whatever this command is?

These questions are just a starting point. But when we understand God's purpose for his commands, it can help us understand more about his character, his love for us, and his desires for the world instead of us feeling like we're being restricted in some way. When we correctly see God for who he is and understand his commands flow out of that reality,

we are able to respond from a place of joyful obedience instead of begrudging rule-following and we can experience so much more freedom as a result.

Communion then pray.