

What's the Point?
[Deuteronomy 5:6-21; 6:4-9](#), [Mark 12:28-31](#)

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I am old enough I remember when seatbelts were not mandatory. I remember as a small child crawling around in the backseat of the car and even crawling up onto the ledge under the rear window. Of course, that changed many years ago and now seatbelts are both mandatory and widely used.

Why did the government start mandating seatbelts? Why do we have all those 'Click it or Ticket' campaigns? What's the point of them? Was it just something capricious the government thought it would do? Was it a way for seatbelt manufacturers to make money? Did the Highway Safety Administration need something to do? Is that why seatbelts became mandatory?

No. Of course not. Seatbelts became mandatory because society decided life is precious, and seatbelts save a lot of lives. Society decided life is so precious the state stepped in and required us all to wear seatbelts.

And you have to admit, it works. All the data says regular seatbelt use saves lives. Putting on our seatbelt may be a joy, it may be a burden, but it works. The point of wearing seatbelts is they save lives.

In the last few years, there's been a campaign to stop texting and driving. Put the Phone Down and Drive! We've seen those ads. In many places it's the law. Don't text and drive. It makes us safer drivers, and it helps us trust our fellow drivers on the road. We're not worried about who's texting and driving.

The point is it's easy to get hurt or killed when we're texting and driving. Laws against it help make us safer.

As Christians, we follow certain rules, commandments, laws. Why? Why do we follow these laws? Are they arbitrary? Are they capricious? Did God say, "I think I'll jerk those human chains a bit, give them some really bizarre rules to follow!" What's the point of following the law?

There are something like 613 individual laws in the Old Testament. Strict, religious Jews do their best to follow them.

Christians, and most Jews, have brought that number down to about 10. Or maybe 2, depending on how you group them. Let's look at the big Ten, the Ten Commandments.

Interesting thing about the 1st three laws is, they tell us something about God and our relationship to God. Notice that. They tell us God is the one who frees us from our bondage. And so, we should treat God with respect, even awe. In fact, they tell us God is our most important relationship. Right off the bat, we learn something about the one who gives us these laws and how we are to respond.

The next law tells us something about rest. Everyone, all of us, even the slave and the donkey, need rest. What happens when they don't rest? The ox and the donkey wear out. They get sick and die more easily. When slaves don't get enough sleep, they get sick and die more easily. Health is important. This law is telling us health is important and even the oppressed, even the illegal immigrant and the homeless addict, must be allowed to rest.

This law tells us something about living together well.

The next law, honoring our parents. What happens when children turn on their parents? What happens when adult children take out their frustrations on their parents? The family breaks down. The basic building block of society breaks down. This law tells us something about living together well.

Murder. Adultery. What would happen if we were allowed to kill each other whenever we wanted? What if everyone who ever

wanted to kill us were allowed to? What if it was OK to steal someone else's beloved? What if everyone turned a blind eye when someone stole the one we love most in the world?

We would live in fear. We would live in constant fear for our relationships and our very lives. This law tells us something about living together well.

What if stealing were never punished? What if lying about someone was OK? Society would break down. Our culture would fall apart. This law tells us something about living together well.

In a way, you could say all these laws go back to coveting. Coveting is desire run rampant. Desire out of control. It's when we covet we begin contemplating theft and adultery. It's when we covet a different way of life, when we begin obsessing over our childhood memories, we begin neglecting our parents.

It's when we covet, rapaciously desiring something, we begin creating false idols. It's when we begin treating God as a casual curse rather than the one who frees us from our slavery to sin. This law tells us something about living together well.

What's the point of the Ten Commandments? Why does God want us to follow them? Because they help us live together well. They help us live together in peace and love. Following these laws helps us live together the way God wants us to.

The law is God's gift to us. The law is God's great gift of love to God's people. So, when we follow the law we are, of course, honoring God. But we are also living together well in loving relationships.

What's the point? The Ten Commandments help us honor God by living together well in loving relationships. That's the point. We are honoring God by living together well in loving relationships. The Ten Commandments are God's great gift to us, they help us live the way God wants us to live.

At first glance, in our New Testament lesson, Jesus is telling us nothing new. But actually, he's going out on a limb. Jesus is giving us a new way of thinking about the law.

In Jesus' time, there were some who argued the law is the law. Every law is of equal value. You break one law, you've broken all 613. You have to memorize all of them and obey all of them.

But Jesus, says "No." Jesus says we can summarize the law into just two. We can cover all 613 laws with just two: love God with your whole self and love your neighbor just as much as you love yourself. Love God with everything you've got and be just as concerned for your neighbor's wellbeing as you are for your own. We don't have to follow 613 laws if we just follow these two. Love God like no other. Love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves.

Another way to say it is to share the self-giving love of the cross with God and our neighbor. We honor God, and our neighbor, when we love with the self-giving love of the cross.

Obviously, there is a lot more we could say. I could stand here the rest of the day and talk about loving God and loving our neighbor and not even scratch the surface. People of goodwill can, and do, disagree about the law and what it means to live together the way God wants us to. Is gambling a sin? Is drinking alcohol a sin? Is premarital sex a sin? Is changing my birth-gender for the opposite gender a sin? Some Christians say it is a sin to serve in the military. Other Christians make a career of sharing God's love with those who kill for their country.

These are hard issues. They demand more than a quick summary. But I'll do my best.

There is a rabbinic tale about a man who came to the Rabbi and said, "Rabbi, can you recite the entire law while standing on one foot?" The Rabbi said, "Yes. I can." "Prove it!" "Ok."

The Rabbi stood on one foot and said, “Love God with your entire self and love your neighbor as yourself.” Then, he put his foot down and said, “The rest is commentary. Now go, and learn the commentary.”

My friends – love the Lord your God with your entire self and love your neighbor as yourself. And learn the commentary. Amen.